

OLD!
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
retro* GAMER™
AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE
THE ULTIMATE NES MINI GUIDE
WE INVESTIGATE THE 30 GAMES INCLUDED WITH NINTENDO'S SYSTEM
INSIDE SEGA'S EPIC BRAWLER
STREETS OF RAGE II
MIKITO ICHIKAWA DISCUSSES HIS HARD-HITTING CLASSIC
ALSO INSIDE
MASTER SYSTEM
HALLS OF THE THINGS
CHAIN REACTION
SUPER GAME BOY
JIM HUETHER
SNAPPER
PANG
OFFICIAL retro GAMER SEAL OF QUALITY
THE HISTORY OF WORMS
CUTE CARNAGE IS UNLEASHED AS TEAM17 OPENS UP ITS ARMOURY
REVISITING THE NEO-GEO CD
WAS THE ADDITION OF A DISC DRIVE A GOOD IDEA FOR SNK?
ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
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ISSUE 159
CELEBRATING CODEMASTERS
RELIVE 30 YEARS OF ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT GAMES
CREATING CRASH BANDICOOT
THE RISE AND FALL OF GAMING'S MOST FAMOUS MARSUPIAL

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE WORMS WEAPON



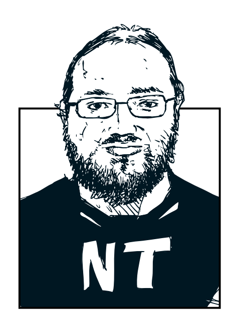
DARRAN JONES

I'll go for the Shotgun. It gets messier the closer you get.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Dungeon Travellers 2: The Royal Library & The Monster Seal

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

As a master of subtlety and Wile E. Coyote enthusiast, I'll pick a humble stick of dynamite. Lay it, light it and leg it.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
The King Of Fighters XIV

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



LUKE ALBIGÉS

Ninja Rope – I'm all about the fancy acrobatic delivery of explosives. Also, anyone who uses homing weapons or air strikes is scum.

Expertise:
Unstoppable *Bomberman* player and real-life Guitar Hero

Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Generations

Favourite game of all time:
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament



DREW SLEEP

There's nothing quite like sending an enemy worm down a pit with nothing but a Holy Hand Grenade for company.

Expertise:
World domination (by the way of Magikarp)

Currently playing:
The Last Of Us Remastered

Favourite game of all time:
Rocket Knight Adventures

SAM RIBBITS

The baseball bat. And I don't just mean from the edge of the level – hitting a screaming rival into the sea from long range is the pinacle of worm-to-worm combat.

Expertise:
Pixels

Currently playing:
Pokémon Go

Favourite game of all time:
Croc: The Legend Of The Gobbos



PAUL DRURY

It has to be the Sheep. Or Super Sheep if you are spoiling me. How could I pick anything else?

Expertise:
Hot tub etiquette

Currently playing:
Riptide GP

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



GRAEME MASON

Never played it, but they must have a rocket launcher, so I'll go for that.

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
Lumo

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



DAVID CROOKES

The sheep. They were baaad – just like that joke, I guess.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
The Day Of The Tentacle Remastered

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



JASON KELK

I can be endlessly childish sometimes and like explosions, so I'll go for the Sheep.

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero

Currently playing:
Gun Wings

Favourite game of all time:
Io

LOADING...

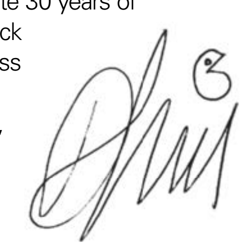


I have fond memories of the *Streets Of Rage* series. I've always enjoyed scrolling beat-'em-ups, particularly the ones from Capcom, but *Final Fight* on the SNES failed to do the business for me, due to its missing level and single-player gameplay.

The Mega Drive's *Streets Of Rage* became my home brawler of choice, but it still didn't feel quite as epic as the arcade brawlers I used to enjoy playing. Sure it had incredible music and a great array of characters to choose from, but there was something missing, something not quite right. Sega's sequel, released a year after the Mega Drive original, improved the already enjoyable concept. The music had been enhanced and the characters looked as if they had jumped out of an arcade machine. In short, it's pretty much perfect and it's a testament to the game's quality that it finished so high in your top 150 games list.

We've been lucky enough to interview Mikito Ichikawa, one of the designers of Sega's seminal brawler about the game's creation and how it improved on Capcom's *Final Fight* series. We've also visited Team17 to discover how *Worms* has evolved over the past 21 years, celebrate 30 years of Codemasters and look back at *Pang*. In short, regardless of whether you love busting heads or balloons, you'll find this issue has something for everyone.

Enjoy the magazine!





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>> Load 159 Breathing new life into classic games

NES: Now Even Smaller

Excited about the NES Mini? We take a closer look at every game being released on it.



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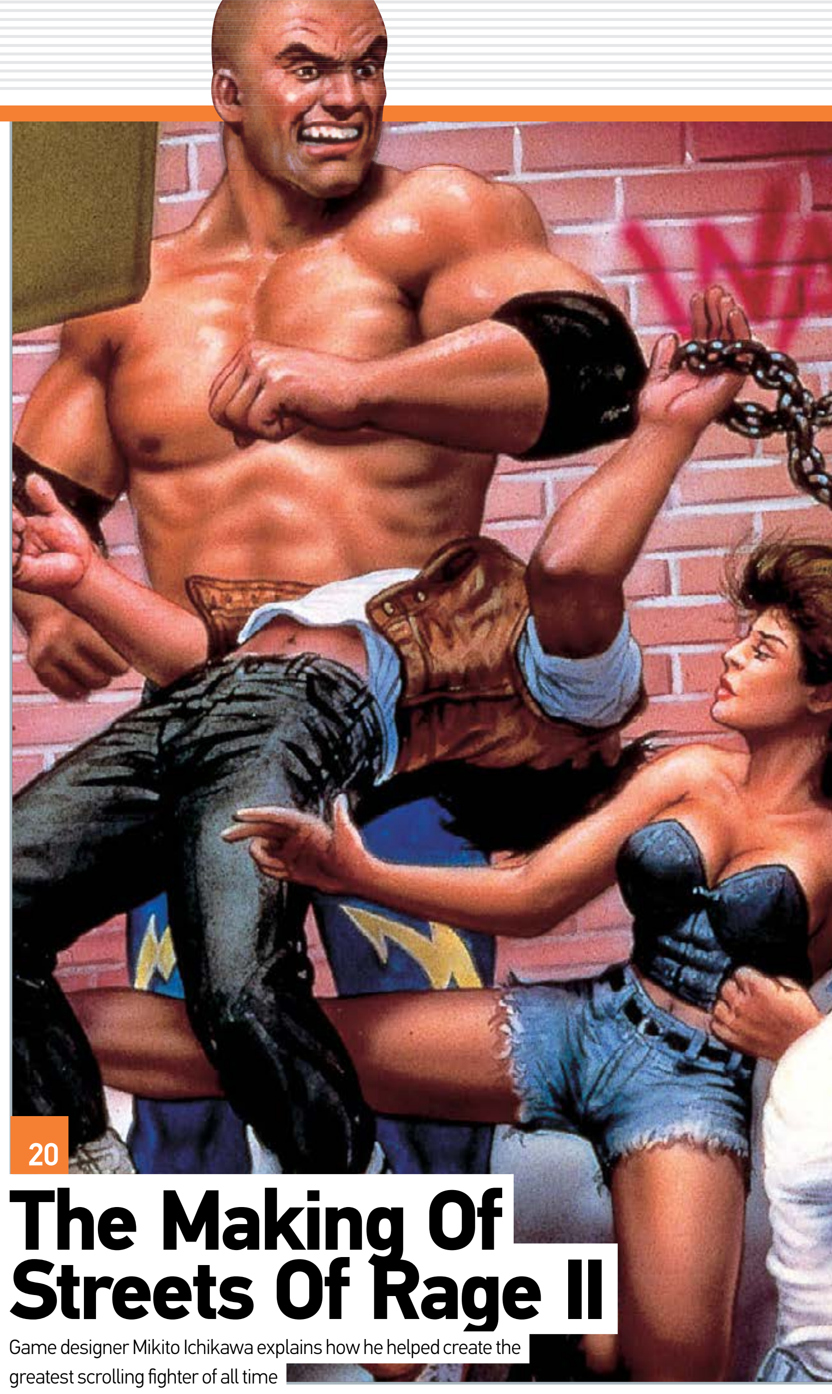
RETRO RADAR

REVIVALS



FEATURED

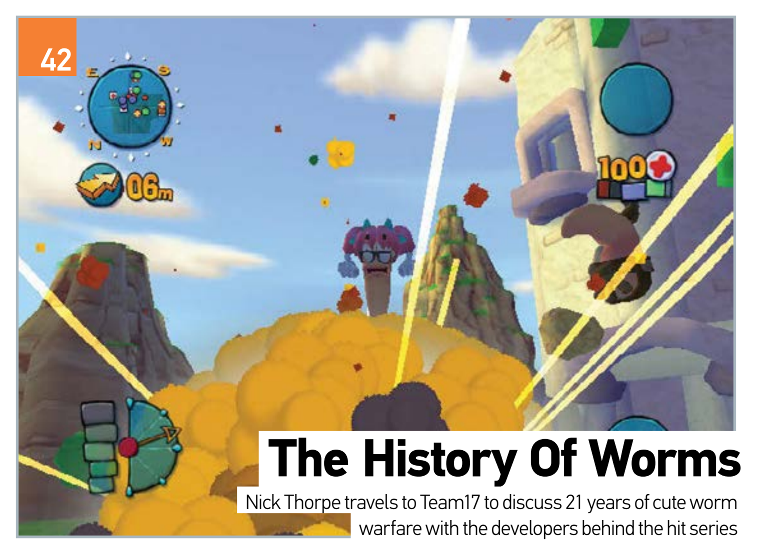




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The Making Of Streets Of Rage II

Game designer Mikito Ichikawa explains how he helped create the greatest scrolling fighter of all time



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The History Of Worms

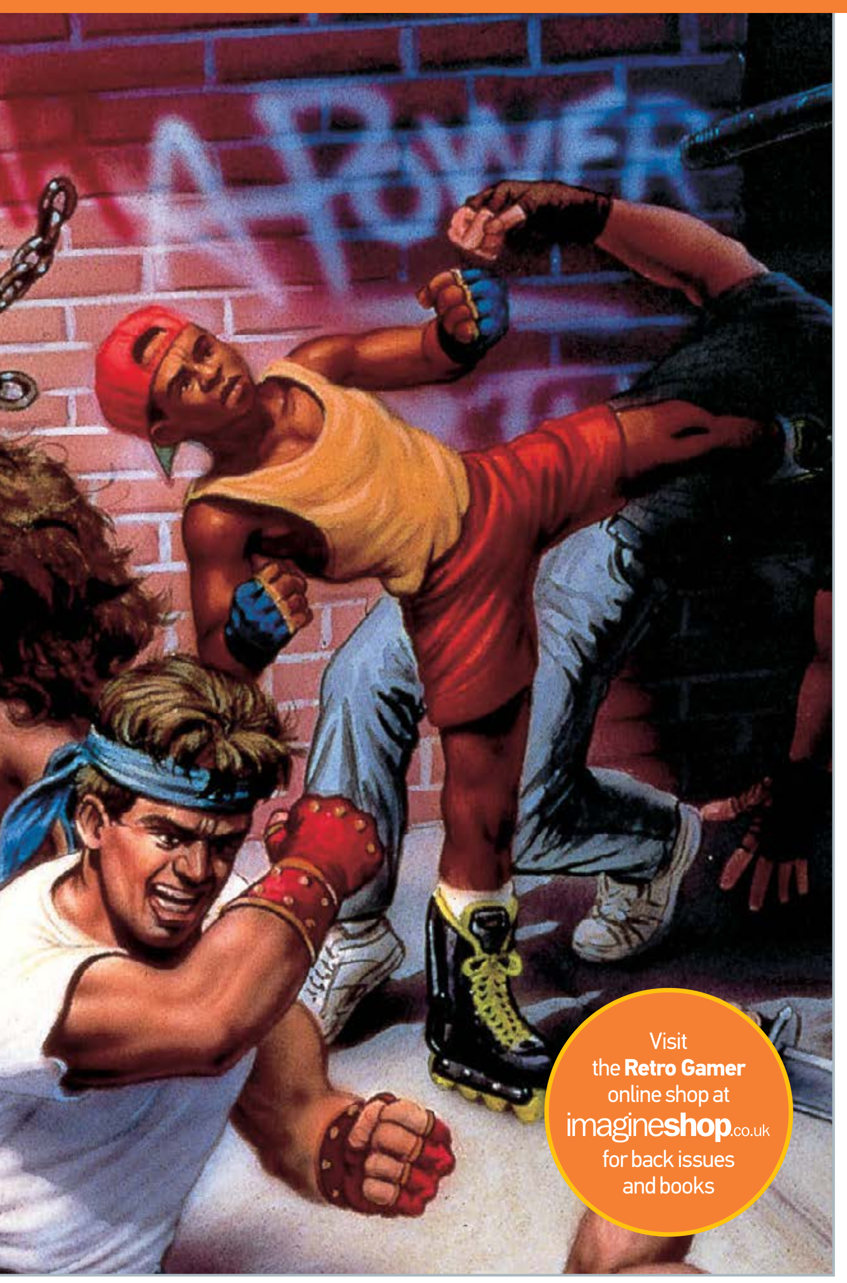
Nick Thorpe travels to Team17 to discuss 21 years of cute worm warfare with the developers behind the hit series

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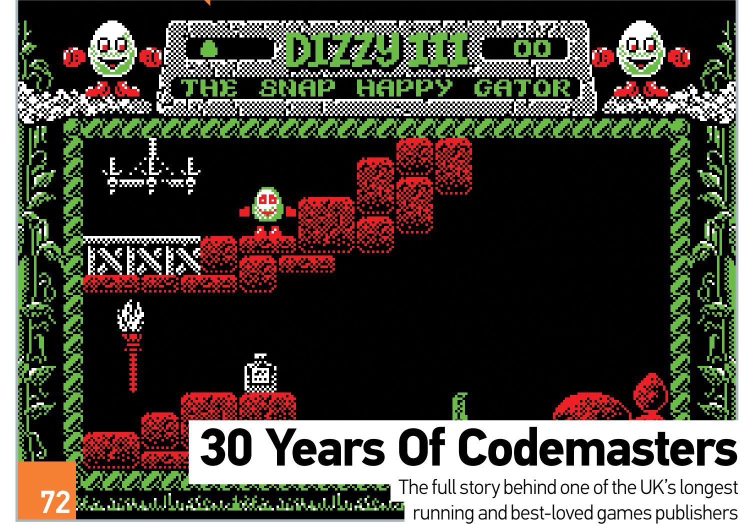


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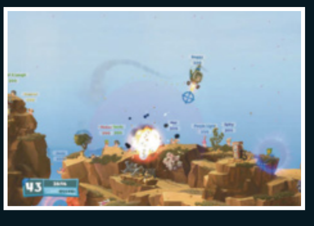


"They were tough negotiators and the interests of the business always came first"



REVIEWS







ESSENTIALS

Have your say!

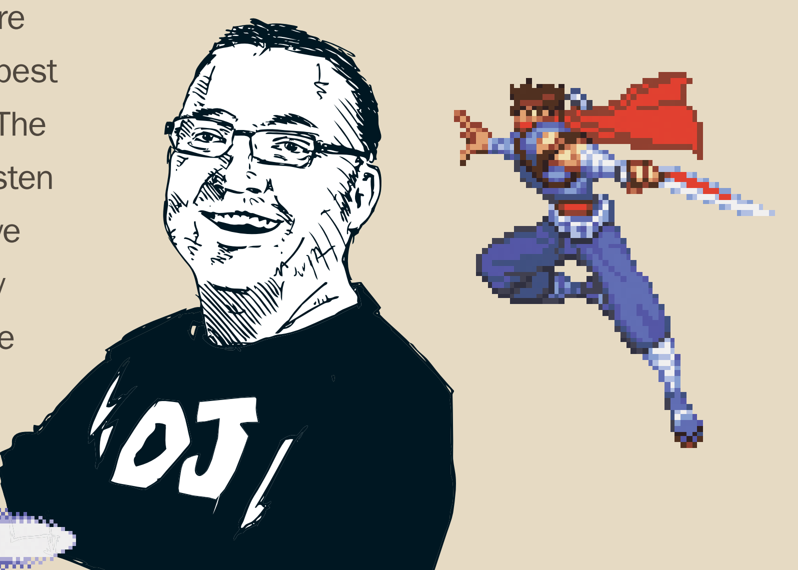
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Hi everybody. Here at **Retro Gamer**, we're amazingly passionate about making the best magazine possible for you every month. The easiest way to do that, of course, is to listen to what you want. With that in mind, we've put together a short, three-minute survey that will allow your voices to be heard. We look forward to your ideas.





Darran Jones
Editor



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Gain a place on our reader panel, giving you regular input on the magazine



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retrogamer.net/survey2016

Four changes you asked for in 2015…

Last year we used your input to make some fantastic improvements, including…

1 Reader Interaction

We know our readers love to be involved, so we've made sure that's the case, both online and via social media services



2 Better Access

We've thrown the retro net out wide to catch many new developers that have never been interviewed in the magazine before

3 Balanced coverage

It's clear that our readers love all eras of retro, from the Spectrum to the PS2, so we've tweaked our features accordingly



4 Great Features

We've improved our cover features to ensure that they cover every aspect of the featured game, no matter how obscure

retro radar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

CONTENTS

OLD HEDGEHOG, NEW TRICKS

Head of Sonic Team Takashi Iizuka discusses Sonic Mania and Sonic 2017

It's not been easy being a fan of Sonic The Hedgehog in recent years. While he's been well catered for with some very good updates of his classic 16-bit era games, recent 3D games have ranged from the average (*Sonic: Lost World*) to the downright awful (basically any game with the words 'Sonic' and 'Boom' in the title).

Sonic Colours and *Sonic Generations* are easily the best 3D *Sonic* games of recent times and we'd argue that the reason they work is because Sonic Team is well aware that there are two types of *Sonic* fans, as Sonic Team leader Takashi Iizuka confirms to us. "We've tried to please our fans with games that are directed to their favourite Sonic," begins Iizuka. "In 2010, we released *Sonic 4* for 2D fans, *Sonic Colors* for 3D fans, and in 2011, we released *Sonic Generations* for fans of both to enjoy. The two new titles announced at the 25th Anniversary Party (*Sonic Mania* and *Sonic 2017*) are also projects that we planned so both old fans and recent fans would be able to enjoy what lies ahead."

The recent Summer Of Sonic clearly revealed that Sonic Team is listening to its fans, with the promising new retro-themed game, *Sonic Mania*, available for all to play on the show floor. It received a rapturous reception at the show, with our own *Sonic* resident fanatic, Nick Thorpe saying, "It's the *Sonic* game *Sonic 4* should have been." Of course, it helps massively that this is as conventional a *Sonic* game as you could get, with proper 2D design and plenty of love towards the original games that made Sonic so iconic in the first place. After 20 or more years, the mainline titles from the Mega Drive era are still being ported to multiple devices and many fans are still enjoying them. *Sonic*

READER POLL
Are you looking forward to Sonic Mania?

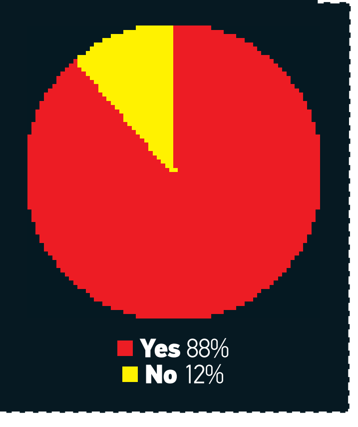
Yep, looking forward quite a bit. I think *Sonic* just fundamentally works better as a 2D game, and the sooner Sega comes to terms with that the better.
Sal Feena

This is exactly what I have been hoping for years now. The team behind it are a good pedigree and the style is on point with the Sega Saturn era. I cannot contain my excitement for the game and it's going to be an agonising wait until it comes.
Grizzly

The trailer look great plus Christian Whitehead is involved, that's enough to make this a yes for me.
RetroBob

Bought a Xbox 360 to play *Sonic 4* and it was a load of tosh, I won't be getting a new console to play this one, but I'm still "looking forward to it".
TwoHeadedBoy

It's never been a big franchise for me if I'm honest. These days it feels like a dead horse of a franchise that keeps being flogged despite its growing irrelevance. Hopefully the fans will get something they're happy with.
The Beans



Yes 88%
No 12%



» [PC] Green Hill Zone now looks more inviting due to a cool cave structure for the background.

» [PC] No, we've never seen this enemy before either. It's from the new Studiopolis Zone.

"Sonic Mania has brand new levels and iconic levels which have been reimagined"
Takashi Iizuka

Mania was planned as we wanted those fans who deeply love those classic titles to get something new."

And something new is definitely the order of the day. While *Sonic Mania* clearly features stages from past 2D *Sonic* games they're certainly not as you remember them… "*Sonic Mania* has brand-new levels and iconic levels which have been reimagined," confirms Iizuka. "In the brand-new levels, players can enjoy never-before-seen bosses, new gimmicks and new places to explore that are in the style of the original classic *Sonic*. In the past levels, there are surprises and fun elements that have been added to the game. Players who are big fans of those games will instantly recognise the original levels, and have fun uncovering the new things that have been added."

We certainly love the look of *Mania* and it certainly plays like the old Sonic games too. In short, it feels *right* – something we've not often been able to say with later *Sonic* games. We'd argue that this authenticity is down to the inclusion of both Christian Whitehead and Simon Thomley, two hardcore *Sonic* fans who have been flying the unofficial flag for several years and recently began doing official smartphone ports for Sega. "The first time I heard of Christian Whitehead was when he ported *Sonic CD* for the smartphone, and after that, when he added Tails and Knuckles to the port of the *Sonic* series," reveals Iizuka. "His enthusiasm and talent impressed me. *Sonic Mania* is a title for the fans who loves the classic series. So I felt that his knowledge and talent, along with him being a fan and longtime supporter of *Sonic* would help us develop the best possible game."

Sonic Mania is looking and sounding very promising, then, but it isn't the only Sega game that Sega has in the pipeline, with an additional project, tentatively titled *Sonic 2017*, due later next year. Understandably, Iizuka is rather coy about the game's details, and was unwilling to reveal too much new information to us… "The release is more than a year ahead, so there is nothing we can reveal besides what was shown in the trailer," he tells us, "but in that trailer, there are many hints which allow you to imagine the actual game. So, for now, please take a look on that trailer and let your imagination take over."

Sonic 2017 may be shrouded in mystery at the moment, but it appears to be taking inspiration from both *Sonic Colours* and *Sonic Generations*, which makes us feel a lot more optimistic about its eventual release. It's just the tip of the anniversary iceberg, however, and Sega is confident that there's still plenty of life in their popular hedgehog yet. "We informed our fans on a lot of new things that are coming to Sonic at our 25th Anniversary Party," concludes Iizuka. "Not only about the two new titles, but also the gameplay trailer of Warner Brothers' *Lego Dimensions*, season two of the animated series *Sonic Boom*, a collaboration with Hello Kitty (Sanrio), and more. We as a team are thinking that expanding the area where Sonic can be seen, so not only in videogames, but also on various media and merchandises and evolving him from a 'videogame icon' to an 'entertainment icon' is our mission. Please keep an eye on us as we look forward to the future of Sonic." *



» [PC] If you're not excited about this title screen, check your pulse. You're probably dead.

SONIC BLOOM

What can Sonic fans look forward to?



LEGO DIMENSIONS: SEASON 2 (2016)
Interestingly, Warner Bros. is shying away from an all-out sequel, instead focusing on the same level and character packs that made the first *Lego Dimensions* such a success. Little is known about how Sonic will translate to the world of *Lego*, but trailers suggest that developer Traveller's Tales is well aware of what makes the blue hedgehog tick, having created both *Sonic 3D Blast* and *Sonic R* in the past.

SONIC BOOM: FIRE & ICE (2016)
While the animated show is popular, things weren't as rosy for the videogames, with *Rise Of Lyric* on Wii U receiving a particular savage mauling by critics and becoming the lowest-selling main *Sonic* game. *Fire & Ice builds* on the mechanics found in *Shattered Crystal*, but adds new elemental attacks that allow Sonic and his buddies to interact with the game world.

SONIC MANIA (2017)
Nick was playing this non-stop at Summer Of Sonic and is convinced that Sega is on to a winner with its new 2D Sonic game. Graphically it's superb with stunning-looking visuals that greatly build upon the original Mega Drive games. It also feels authentic with all the inertia and physics you'd expect from a *Sonic* game.

SONIC 2017 (2017, duh)
This is the hardest game to judge, because so little was given away in the trailer. After the weak reception of the *Sonic Boom* games we're inclined to say that Sega is going to give us something more in the vein of the *Generations*, as it features both the classic and modern forms of Sonic.



» It's pleasing to see classic Sonic is making a return.

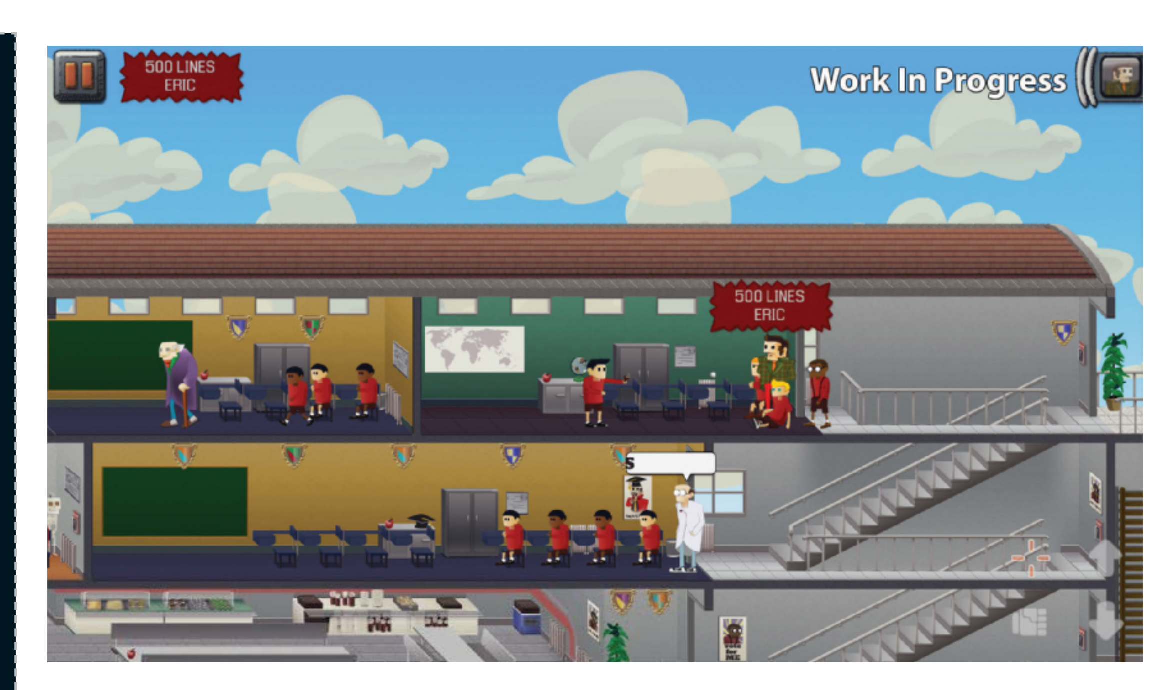
FLASH BACK TO THE PAST

Fans of the Atari Flashback will be pleased to learn that a seventh iteration of the popular system is on the way. Due out in November this year, the Flashback 7 will feature 101 Atari 2600 games, including *Frogger, Warlords, Yars' Revenge, Asteroids, Adventure, Crystal Castles* and more. It also comes with two authentic-looking controllers which are wireless, meaning you don't need to sit too close to your TV. Sadly, it doesn't appear to feature SD card support, meaning you won't be able to play some homebrew games that are available. A portable Flashback is also on the way, but will only feature 60 of the available games. Look out for reviews of both in a later issue.

EMULATOR HEAVEN

Sony's PSP is held in high esteem by many retro gamers due to the many emulators it has access to. It would appear that the PS Vita could soon overtake it as the handheld of choice, as it too has been recently hacked. Sony has been quick to react with a new update that makes it a lot harder to crack, but we'd imagine that it will not be long before the system is circumvented again. We've not had a chance to try the workaround, but early reports suggest that games like *Super Mario World* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* look absolutely excellent on the Vita's OLED screen. It's unclear just what later systems the Vita will be able to run, but expect the list of compatible systems to rise as more and more hackers continue to delve into the console's innards.

» Will Dreamcast games appear on Vita? We'll find out soon enough.



GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

ROGER HULLEY ON REMAKING SKOOL DAZE

Skool Daze remains one of the Spectrum's best-loved games, offering progressive sandbox gaming that immediately made it stand apart from its peers. Created by David and Helen Reidy in 1984, it was a flagship title for Microsphere, and a sequel, *Back To Skool*, quickly followed.

Now, nearly three decades after its original release, *Skool Daze* is set to return, courtesy of Alternative Software. "We bought all of Microsphere's catalogue of games back in the late Eighties," explains Alternative's managing director, Roger Hulley. "This new version will feature not only *Skool Daze*, but also *Back To Skool* within the same game."

Available on various tablet devices later in the year, the game has largely flown under our radar, but Roger is confident that it will appeal to those that grew up with the Spectrum original. "[We've added] numerous modern twists [to the gameplay] as well, although the developers have kept the essence of both the originals, throughout the game," he continues.

Although we're pleased to see that Eric will be once again getting up to trouble and causing his teachers a great deal of stress, we're not too keen with the art direction the game has taken and were keen to know if there was an option to feature the original 8-bit graphics. Sadly, it's not to be, although Roger was quick to point out that the original *Skool Daze* game is available to play on your mobile or tablet via the Spectaculator app.

Skool Daze will be available later in the year and reviewed in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**. In the meantime why not head over to the official Facebook page at facebook.com/skooldazegame to share your opinions about not only the new game, but your memories of the original, too.

> "We bought all of Microsphere's catalogue of games back in the late Eighties"
> Roger Hulley




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Here's my bio… Paul Davies

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Playing With Less Power

With its upcoming NX console, Nintendo looks like abandoning the power struggle once and for all, in favour of a more handheld-driven approach. While this is not the whole story, it does rather sever one huge retro link to the past.

Okay, it isn't just Nintendo that is shying away from monstrous (in a good way) new consoles, the kind of which we used to enjoy from the late Eighties through early Noughties. Both Sony and Microsoft shot comparatively low with PS4 and Xbox One in terms of initial oomph and traditional longevity, with nowhere near the same impact of PS3 or Xbox 360 at launch. And so, old friends, it does appear that the age of hot-rod gaming consoles is finally over.

Please join me as I take a moment to reflect.

Mainly, I was hoping that Nintendo would return to the fray with at something formidable… in the old way of speaking. Sure, NX will attract attention as an unusually powerful portable gaming device with its detachable controllers. But, as beautiful as *Breath Of The Wild* already looks on Wii U, and something like this on a handheld is certainly to die for, NX is not what I had hoped for going into the next – possibly last – hardware generation from my beloved.

I'm just saddened that, what seems for sure now, there will be no *Super Metroid* or *Mario 64* moments from Nintendo ever again. Or, indeed, *Jumping Flash* (PlayStation), *SoulCalibur* (Dreamcast) and *Halo: Combat Evolved* (Xbox) – generational leaps in gaming performance. The mysterious might of the microprocessor, harnessed like a mythical beast purely for our entertainment, is no longer the shared dream. The hardware giants may be playing it smart, but we gamers will just have to accept that we'll be playing with less power from now on.

I genuinely wanted, would have loved to see, Nintendo return to its 'eat this!' glory with NX. It would've been awesome to have witnessed the unveiling of a machine that embodied the spirit of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and the first wave of Nintendo 64 mania.

I had this scenario in my mind where Mr Miyamoto would cheekily unveil a new *Mario* game that looked like a Pixar movie, in partnership with one of the visual computing leaders, AMD or Nvidia. Perhaps an on-stage demonstration of *Breath Of The Wild* for Wii U, followed by a glimpse of the next adventure for the new console resembling scenes from Disney's *Brave*.

But what an old-fashioned, retro dream that really is. And this is something I realised when I reverted to browsing PCs again for the first time in 20 years. I've regressed to the time that young me would marvel at what emerged from peculiar boxes with their keyboards that went click-clack to command an unending procession of unusual challenges.

Instead of aching to bring home the latest 'PC Engine' (still my favourite name for a console by far) I'm thinking, 'What the heck, I may as well buy the whole fricking thing.' I could lie to myself this time – instead of my parents – that I need this PC to help with my homework.

We can now argue over which was the greatest, most amazing, pure gaming console of all time. Ironically, mine would be one made by Nintendo. *

What do you think?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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the vault

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

Out Run Vinyl Soundtrack

It's disappointing that the iconic Testarossa doesn't feature on the cover, but this is another excellent effort from Data-Disks. The original tracks feature on side A, while the bonus Mega Drive and 3DS tracks make out side B. It's a shame that some of the later remixes haven't been included, but there's no denying the quality of what's on offer. Plus, it's come out at the perfect time, meaning you can carry the sound of summer into the impending gloomy autumn.

Price: £19.99 **From:** data-discs.com

GPD XD

The GPD XD is the latest portable Android device to cater for all your emulation and homebrew needs, and it's arguably one of the most impressive devices of its kind that we have played on.

The build quality isn't the best, due to some spongy buttons and an uncomfortable D-pad, but the actual touchscreen is surprisingly good. It's preloaded with a large number of emulators, but they're relatively low on options, so you're better off installing your own. Luckily, that's a cinch to do thanks to adding them via the Google Play Store or via side-loading APKs. The power of the machine is impressive, too, and it's able to emulate a large number of systems, including N64, Game Boy Advance, PlayStation, Neo-Geo, Commodore 64, Amiga and even the Dreamcast with very few issues. It's a very versatile piece of kit that should cater to all your emulation needs.

Price: £159.99 (32GB), £189.99 (64GB)
From: funstockretro.co.uk



The Spectrum Of Adventure

It may not have a snappy name, but this dedicated tome to Spectrum text and graphic adventures is worth a read. Thomas A. Christie has selected 100 games across the genre, ranging from hits such as *The Hobbit*, to curios like Taskset's *Souls Of Darkon*. Even if the subject matter doesn't sound appealing, the sheer number of fascinating facts should ensure that you look at the genre in a different light going forward.

Price: £16.99 **From:** amazon.co.uk

Retro Mugs

If you're looking for something to hold your hot beverage then allow us to recommend these rather lovely mugs from Gametee. What we like about both is the subtle designs they both feature, which have an almost Mondo-like feel to them in terms of their look and style. Obviously, fans of both *Grim Fandango* and *Pokémon* are going to be interested in them, but we'd argue that their distinctive designs will appeal to any gamer, particularly that stunning-looking Manny one.

Price: £9.99 **From:** gametee.co.uk

Everdrive 64 V3

Thanks to the increasing prices of classic videogames, Everdrives are becoming more popular. This latest offering from Krikzz updates the previous version by adding 256KB battery RAM, a RTC, an easier to use SD card slot as well as a 800k-1MB USB port for anyone who wants to dabble in development.

Both SD and SDHC cards are supported and it's almost 100 per cent compatible with the N64 library. It also includes a NES emulator, making it perfect for lazy gamers who don't want to swap cartridges over.

Price: £129.99 **From:** retrotowers.co.uk



WORLD WAR ONE COMES TO WORLD OF TANKS

WARGAMING IS CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE FIRST BATTLEFIELD TANK DEPLOYMENT WITH SPECIAL EVENTS AND AN APP

From 15 September 2016 *World Of Tanks* will commemorate 100 years of tank deployment on the battlefield with special events across its titles. On 15 September 1916 the Mark I tank became the first such vehicle to be deployed as it was sent out during the Battle Of The Somme. To mark this historic occasion *World Of Tanks* is bringing the Mark I to PC, consoles and *World Of Tanks Blitz* on mobile devices.

Each format will be getting its own bespoke content for marking the anniversary. On PC a two-week in-game event called Convoy will see players escorting a Mark I with the use of Lanchester Armoured Cars. On consoles, a Trench Warfare mode will launch for a limited time. In this mode type you will be able to use Mark I tanks in intense trench combat with new features, such as flamethrower bunkers and ground explosions, to keep you occupied. And finally on mobile, *Blitz* will see all players given a Mark I tank in their inventory for one week that can be used in a special game type exclusive to Mark I pilots.

All of this is being done as part of Wargaming's anniversary plans in conjunction with The Tank Museum. A new app, called Tank 100, is also being released to mark the 100th anniversary of the first battlefield tank deployment. Not only is the app packed with info on tanks from throughout the last 100 years of warfare, tanks will also be appearing in 100 locations up and down the UK. You can find out more by visiting wargaming.com. *

SCAN THIS CODE TO DOWNLOAD THE TANK 100 APP NOW!

» [PC] The Mark I anniversary is a limited time event across the *World Of Tanks* titles. If you want to get involved on PC, console or mobile you need to jump in from 15 September. After a few weeks the special game modes will be gone.

» [PC] The Tank 100 app includes an AR photo mode to let you take pictures of tanks wherever you like. Future content will be coming to the app as other anniversaries land in the coming year.

BACK TO THE NINETIES

[Dreamcast] *Dead Or Alive 2* was a massive improvement over Team Ninja's original fighting game.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1999

OCTOBER 1999 – Dreamcast arrives in Europe, Pac-Man is back, man, Sierra releases a Pharaoh game, Pokémon Red & Blue evolves into Yellow while New Tetris arrives complete with hidden message. Richard Burton's Easter Egg has melted…



Priced at £199, Sega's Dreamcast graced retailers in Europe on 14 October, priced more expensively than both the Japanese and North American releases. Ten games were released on launch day including *Sega Bass Fishing*, *Sonic Adventure* and *Virtua Fighter 3tb*.

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Pac-Man*, Namco released *Pac-Man World* for the PlayStation. This 3D free-roaming platform game sees the entire *Pac-Man* family kidnapped and taken to Ghost Island where he must go to rescue them. There are four different modes; Maze, Adventure, Quest and Classic (a conversion of the original arcade game). All were beautifully crafted with a nice big dollop of nostalgia blended in.

Septerra Core by Monolith Productions arrived this month exclusively for PC gamers. The linear role-playing game told a heavily character-driven story set in a intriguing world. At the centre of it all is the Core, home to a legendary object known as the Gift. Left by the creator of Septerra it will bestow incredible powers to the owner. The seven overlaid continents each had a distinct style or theme. Puzzles, spells and dungeons are plentiful, combat was turn-based and while early levels are explored on foot, a ship can be obtained later to speed up access across levels. While *Septerra Core* appeared to be a formulaic RPG, the in-depth story, the sheer variety of characters and clever level layout made it stand out from the RPG crowd.

Sierra Entertainment introduced us to *Ancient Egypt* with its construction simulation game *Pharaoh* for PC. You must build your city and micromanage various elements such as housing and food production, introduce a variety of industries with a view to trading with other cities, keep invaders at bay and appease gods through temple building.

You must cope with problems with immigration, military manoeuvres and hit cultural targets. Do well and you could eventually become Pharaoh. A campaign mode is available in two flavours; peaceful and warmongering. Do well and you can progress through the 38 different missions. Lazy comparisons to *SimCity* followed but *Pharaoh* was much more than that. It was creatively brilliant with its crisp graphics and gameplay keeping hardcore strategists and fair weather simulation fans happy in equal measure.

Having been being released in Japan for over a year, it was North America's turn to welcome Nintendo's *Pokémon* Yellow for the Game Boy. The familiar name was back with this enhanced version of the original *Pokémon Red & Blue*. Your tasks are to defeat the other Pokémon trainers or collect all 151 Pokémon although doing that directly through *Pokémon Yellow* wasn't possible unless connecting to *Pokémon Red & Blue* with a link cable. Needless to say it sold at an absurd rate with one million units bought within two weeks.

Coin-op fans were treated to several new releases this month. *Aqua Rush* by Namco was essentially an upside-down, underwater-themed *Tetris* game that was borderline playable. Another coin-op puzzler from Namco was *Mr. Driller*, a colour block-matching game with overtones of *Boulderdash*.

[PC] Design, build and micromanage every aspect of your city in the excellent *Pharaoh* from Sierra Entertainment.



[PC] *Septerra* was a terrific multi-layered character-driven RPG set on an equally multi-layered world.



THIS MONTH IN…

COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES

C&VG looked at the new *Pokémon* craze. Predicting it would be the Next Big Thing, the team looked at the already-popular videogames and the impending doom that was the collectable game cards. We think they're probably right, seeing that *Pokémon* is still knocking around in 2016…



NINTENDO WORLD

The Nintendo mag had exclusive news revealing that Nintendo planned to release a new generation of Game Boy handheld consoles. The Game Boy Advance would be redesigned in a similarly way to that of Nintendo's Game & Watch games with a landscape design and buttons at the sides of the screen.

OFFICIAL US PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

The standout feature this month was an interview with the team behind *Spyro The Dragon 2*. They talked about the original game and the thought process for the sequel. Also interviewed was former Police drummer, Stuart Copeland, who penned the game's score.



Atari got in on the action with its racing game *San Francisco Rush 2049*. The fast-paced racer featured three modes; race, battle and stunt with five tracks and eight cars to choose from.

More fun and infinitely more playable was *Dead Or Alive 2* from Tecmo. The 3D fighting game saw improvements over the 1996 original with multi-tiered battlegrounds, tag-team matches and a rather useful dodge button. It played absolutely beautifully.

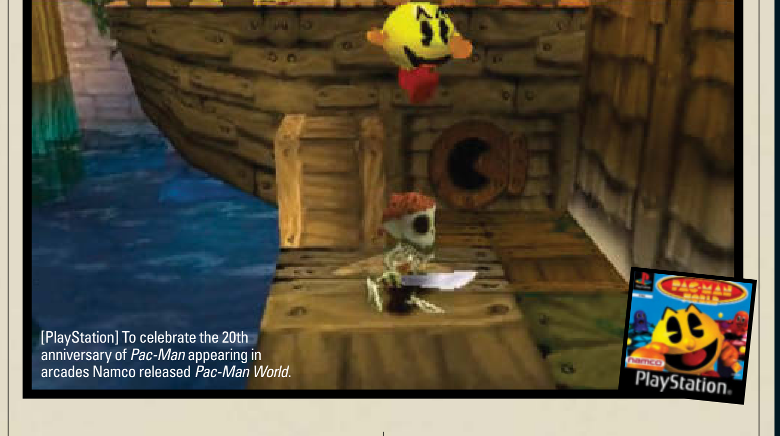
A fun arcade conversion released this month was *Point Blank 2* from Namco. This sequel sees you shoot your way through a series of minigames testing speed, accuracy and memory usually against the clock. As is often the case with games of this ilk, it's much more fun in two player mode. Single-player mode is fine but the challenge of progressing is taken away with unlimited continues. Visually, there was little progression from the original although gameplay was more varied.

A classic retro game returning for an updated release was *The New Tetris* on the N64. The biggest change was the simultaneous four-player mode. Multiplayer games are raucous fun at the best of times but the ability to complete a line and dump the debris from it into your opponents play area would ensure much controller throwing and game rage.

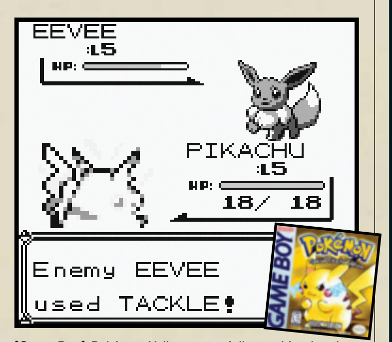
A nice new feature was the ability to make gold squares by slotting together pieces of the same shape to create a 4x4 square for bonus points. A lesser-value silver square could be made using different shaped pieces. Also new was the ability to see the next three falling pieces which helped you plan ahead in your points building. *The New Tetris* also contained an Easter Egg in the code from programmer David Pridie. The message slated his boss for being ineffectual and nitpicking his work while he allegedly sat around playing games.

David continued by ripping into another colleague that threw the programming team under the bus after making a mistake to save his own repetition with Nintendo and within the industry rather than worry about keeping friendships. David ended by criticising *The New Tetris* as being a rushed product and not how the team wanted it to be. To be fair, the game was enjoyable but did lack the polish that David alluded to.

Tragically, just 15 months later David Pridie had died from a sudden bronchial asthma attack at home while playing a videogame. He was just 29. *



[PlayStation] To celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Pac-Man* appearing in arcades Namco released *Pac-Man World*.



[Game Boy] *Pokémon Yellow* essentially combined and enhanced the original *Pokémon Red & Blue*.

OCTOBER 1999

NINTENDO 64

1. Star Wars Episode I Racer (Nintendo)
2. Star Wars: Rogue Squadron (Nintendo)
3. Ocarina Of Time (Nintendo)
4. Quake II (Activision)
5. F-1 World Grand Prix II (Video System)

PLAYSTATION

1. Civilization 2 (Activision)
2. Metal Gear Solid (Konami)
3. FIFA 99 (Electronic Arts)
4. UEFA Championship Manager (Eidos)
5. Rugrats: Studio Tour (THQ)

GAME BOY COLOUR

1. The Rugrats Movie (THQ)
2. Link's Awakening DX (Nintendo)
3. FIFA 2000 (Electronic Arts)
4. Wario Land 2 (Nintendo)
5. WWF Attitude (Acclaim)

MUSIC

1. Genie In A Bottle (Christina Aguilera)
2. Blue (Da Ba Dee) (Eiffel 65)
3. 2 Times (Ann Lee)
4. Flying Without Wings (Westlife)
5. Man! I Feel Like A Woman (Shania Twain)

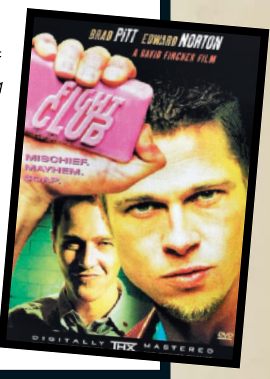
NEWS OCTOBER 1999

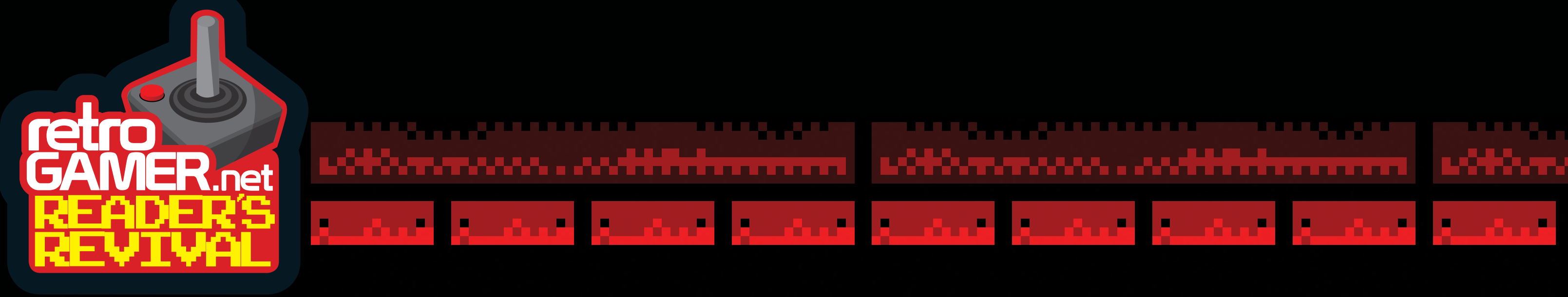
6 October saw the US premiere of *Fight Club* starring Edward Norton and Brad Pitt. The insomniac, nameless narrator of the film (Norton) meets Tyler Durden (Pitt), a soap-selling stranger who forms an underground fight club. More clubs form and the idea spreads throughout the country. Members soon form Project Mayhem, an anti-corporate movement with a plan to blow up buildings containing all credit card details and erasing debt.

25 October saw the death of American professional golfer Payne Stewart. He was killed during his flight home to Florida when his Learjet suffered sudden depressurisation causing hypoxia to all on board. The plane was set to autopilot but eventually crashed into a field after running out of fuel. Stewart was aged 42.

Hey, pop-pickers, let's have a rundown of the best music album releases for October. Newly-released for your listening pleasure was *Hours* (David Bowie), *Showbiz* (Muse), *Nightlife* (Pet Shop Boys), *BBC Sessions* (Cocteau Twins), *Peace* (Eurythmics), *As Time Goes By* (Bryan Ferry), *No.4* (Stone Temple Pilots), *Twenty Four Seven* (Tina Turner) and *Sunday 8pm / Saturday 3am* (Faithless).

4 October saw the debut on BBC One of the TV series *Walking With Dinosaurs*. The six-part series, narrated by Kenneth Branagh, looked at dinosaurs in the style of a wildlife documentary using CGI, animatronics and sweeping real-life landscape shots.





Virtual Boy Wario Land

"MY BRAIN IS AMAZING! IT'S FULL OF WRINKLES, AND… UH…"

#104

» NINTENDO » VIRTUAL BOY » 1986

Good old Virtual Boy. A console that Wario himself could have designed. If you found a way to make playing the thing comfortable (nobody ever did), then after ten minutes of play you most likely started feeling nauseous. And when you paused to go and vomit, you discovered you'd impaired your vision and tripped over something on your way to the bathroom and puked all over yourself.

After you cleaned yourself up, you went back for another stage of Virtual Boy Wario Land. Yes, Wario Land is the type of game worth putting your health at risk for. It plays just as well if not better than its more famous siblings. Likewise, the graphics better those of Wario Lands 2 and 3. Oh, except they're all in black and red.

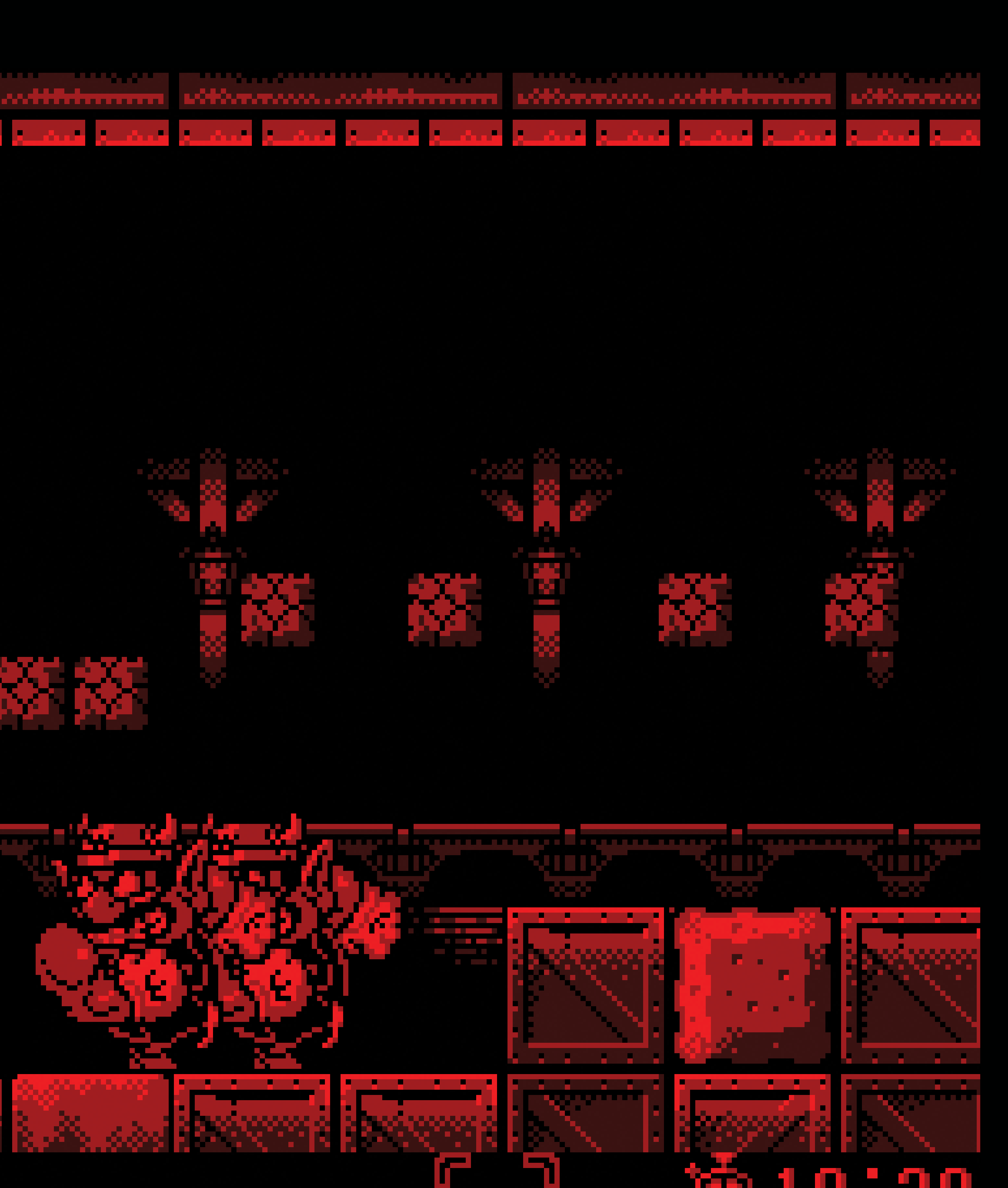
Gameplay will be familiar to fans of the series. Wario controls like Mario but slightly fatter and meaner. He dons various hats that give him special abilities such as flight, ground pounding and dragon breath. The central idea of this adventure is to locate hidden treasure in the levels, find the key and exit.

It's classic Nintendo and could hold its own on any other Ninty console, stripped of its gimmicky visuals. But the 3D really does add another dimension to the game. Obstacles and enemies scale in and out of the screen, the action is on two planes as you hop on ramps to jump from foreground to background and back again. Bosses in particular take great advantage of the extra dimension.

The game only contains fourteen stages, which might seem miserly, but Virtual Boy titles were generally made short in order to avoid players going blind or dying. Consequently, Nintendo made sure these fourteen stages were perfect. If only the same could be said of the host hardware… *

CRAIG HAWKINS

× 2 × 45 × 0021


19:28



Sega's skull-smashing sequel transcends 'classic' status and achieves the title of 'masterpiece'. Luke Albigés catches up with one of the game's creators to find out more about the scrolling fighter that set the beat-'em-up scene ablaze

There are few purer, more basic concepts for a videogame than that of the scrolling fighter. You walk, typically left to right, and the only things with which you can interact with are the procession of punks flowing from the opposite side of the screen and the various kinds of breakable containers that contain everything from weapons and items, to your dinner for the day. You could hand the controller to someone who had never even *seen* a videogame before and after a minute or so, it would still make sense – that's what saw the genre rocket to popularity in Eighties arcades, after all, with attract mode demos showing you literally everything you needed to know in the time it took you to pick up your jaw and rummage around in your pocket in the hope of finding some suitable coinage to try a game for yourself. From *Kung Fu Master* to *Renegade* to *Double Dragon*, games like this proved incredibly popular, a movement that hit full speed when Capcom dropped by with its flashy new CPS tech to claim the genre as its own with seminal brawler, *Final Fight*.



» [Mega Drive] Max is a beast with a steel pipe – he's the only character whose swing hits behind him, too.

While that's the scene that birthed the *Streets Of Rage* series (the original game was more or less a direct answer to arcade favourite *Final Fight* being ported to the SNES and not the Mega Drive), that only goes as far as to explain *why* the series exists, and that in itself is Business Sense 101 – sniff out what sells and make more of it. If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, Haggar must have suffered a rare fit of blushing on the day *Streets Of Rage* was released in 1991. The original game, while solid, was a basic side-scrolling fighter with little of its own to say, but that's not to say that it didn't have a voice. Much of that was provided by composer Yuzo Koshiro, whose work on the series is ▶

DID YOU KNOW?

■ *Streets Of Rage II* is the only game in the series that doesn't have multiple endings. In the original, it was possible to replace Mr X as the head of the syndicate after defeating him (and your co-op buddy) while in *Streets Of Rage III*, difficulty level and route taken both affect which of the various endings you get.



FREE-FOR-ALL

We asked you which character is the best, and here's how you responded…

- 9% SKATE
- 9% MAX
- 24% BLAZE
- 58% AXEL

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** SEGA/ANCIENT
» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
» **GENRE:** SCROLLING BEAT-'EM-UP

FATAL FOUR-WAY

The bold quartet looking to stamp out crime by bringing down Mr X and his cronies

MAX

DIFFICULTY: **MEDIUM**

■ To say that Max hits hard would be about as much of an understatement as referring to the sun as being 'a bit hot'. He's a walking tank, carrying three of the most powerful moves in the game. Sadly, this comes at the expense of mobility, and many beginners will struggle to deal with how sluggish he feels. You can get around this by abusing his slide attack to cover ground quicker (it also has great invulnerability, handily) but if you want to leave those thugs feeling the full power of justice, Max is your guy.



AXEL

DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

■ Without a doubt the easiest character to do well with, Axel gets by almost on the strength of his Grand Upper (forward, forward and attack) alone. It hits hard, has invulnerability and knocks down enemies, making it perfect both as an offensive tool and a defensive option. Ignore the low 'Jump' stat – it's practically irrelevant since he has the tools to get by without ever even needing to leave the ground. If you're looking to get through the game with as little fuss as possible, Axel is your best bet.



BLAZE

DIFFICULTY: **EASY**

■ As you can tell from her stats, Blaze is your traditional all-rounder – no notable strengths but no real weaknesses either. Her moveset is good and even though they're the same on paper, Blaze's movement speed is actually a little quicker than Axel's, which is worth bearing in mind if speed is your goal but you'd rather do without Skate's frailty. Using her cartwheel kick is a great way of getting away from enemies, but remember that it costs a little health to use and don't spam it!



SKATE

DIFFICULTY: **HARD**

■ As much as he may dart around the screen, Skate's attacks only do marginally more damage than hurling insults at the thugs would. He has a few decent moves, however – mount an enemy from behind to perform his amusing (and surprisingly effective) head pound attack, or hit attack and jump at the same time to pull off a mini version of Blaze's cartwheel without spending any health. He's good in the hands of expert players, but anyone else will likely get the poor kid pummeled fairly quickly.





» [Mega Drive] Yeah, Axel and Blaze should probably have checked that Mr X was actually dead at the end of the first game…

▶ celebrated as some of the great videogame music of all time, its thumping house beats squeezing more out of the Mega Drive's sound chip than should be possible and perfectly complementing the fast-paced, neon-drenched action of the games. While it offered little new in terms of gameplay, this superb audiovisual direction gave *Streets Of Rage* the leg-up it needed to land a few punches in the face of *Final Fight* and give Mega Drive owners an exclusive worth championing. Strong commercial and critical reception sent Sega scurrying back to that copy of Business Sense 101, and work on a sequel was quickly commenced in order to ride the wave of success to greater heights, but taking *Streets Of Rage* to the next level would involve bringing in new blood to help create something truly special.

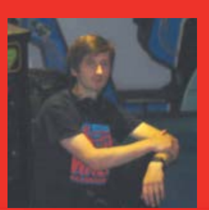
After establishing MNM Software, it was very important to work with major companies in order to stabilise the company's business," recalls *Streets Of Rage II* game designer Mikito Ichikawa. "At that time, Yuzo Koshiro was working with Sega, so I asked him to introduce me to the director of the development department." MNM would assist Ancient on game planning and design for the sequel, as well as lending a hand with audio as it had with the 8-bit ports of the original game as well as several other notable titles such as *Batman Returns* and the awesome Game Gear version of *Shinobi*. Ichikawa, who wasn't involved in the design process of the original *Streets Of Rage*, doesn't appear to have a lot of love for the first game. He describes it as "a *Final Fight* clone," somewhat to our surprise (even though that's exactly what it is), although perhaps that's precisely what



» [Mega Drive] Despite his 'Jump' stat being the lowest, Max's flying kick isn't actually all that awful…

THE SOUND OF THE STREETS

Data Discs' Jamie Crook on the game's soundtrack, and bringing it back to life on vinyl



How much involvement did Yuzo Koshiro have in the process of bringing the mighty *Streets Of Rage II* soundtrack to vinyl?
Koshiro-san was involved from the very outset. To begin with, there wouldn't have been a licensing agreement without his involvement and upfront approval. We signed up the full trilogy in early 2015 and began work on *Streets Of Rage* immediately. For both *SOR* and *SORII*, he supplied us with the original NEC PC-88 files to use. We then combined these with Mega Drive captures. For *SORII*, this process was extremely complex – we used two different Japanese Mega Drives (with different motherboards) and the NEC PC-88 files. We selected the best source for each individual track, based on how suitable it was for mastering and how well we felt it would translate onto the vinyl format. Generally speaking, the PC-88 files were better for more bass-heavy tracks, whilst the MD sources were more suitable for tracks with more high-end frequencies, or tracks that benefited from the distinctive 'noise' inherent in the MD's YM2612 chip (much of *SORII*'s audio details are actually a consequence of how the source files are processed by the Mega Drive itself). For a couple of the more complicated or problematic tracks, we went back to Koshiro-san and requested certain tweaks to the PC-88 source files, mainly to resolve mixing or frequency issues. In the end, we produced around 20 different mastered versions of *SORII*, comprising different combinations of the source files, before settling on the final set. This was then sent to Koshiro-san for his final approval.

Which of Koshiro's other works would you like to give the same kind of treatment?
There are certainly a few that would benefit from a similar process and we're looking forward to working with him again on *Streets of Rage III*.

What do you think it is about the soundtrack that makes it so good?
The music in *SORII* is the product of a creative individual who was given the freedom to experiment. He was given the space to develop ingenious methods of drawing sounds from extremely restrictive hardware and achieved something truly special. *SORII* is the product of one man's fascination with Western dance music (something very rare in Japan at the time), filtered through an Eastern perspective and squashed through a YM2612 sound chip. It really is one of the towering achievements of the 16-bit era.

Were you surprised by how well the music holds up?
Not at all. For most people, I think that Koshiro's work is as memorable as the game itself. We've been listening to the



SOR soundtracks outside of the games for years. In fact, I remember discussing the possibility of pressing the *SOR* trilogy on vinyl with my brother about ten years ago. It was so obviously suitable for the format and I'm still amazed that no-one did it before us.

Do you have any particularly fond memories of the game itself?
Too many to mention. It's been a constant favourite since we were first given a copy for Christmas, circa 1993. I remember about eight years ago, a friend and I spent a good week trying to beat *SORII* on the hidden 'Mania' mode. It was a glorious moment when we finally defeated Mr X. There were hugs involved.

Why do you think *Streets Of Rage II* remains so popular with gamers?
I think it's an example of a perfect game in every respect. It's as simple as that.

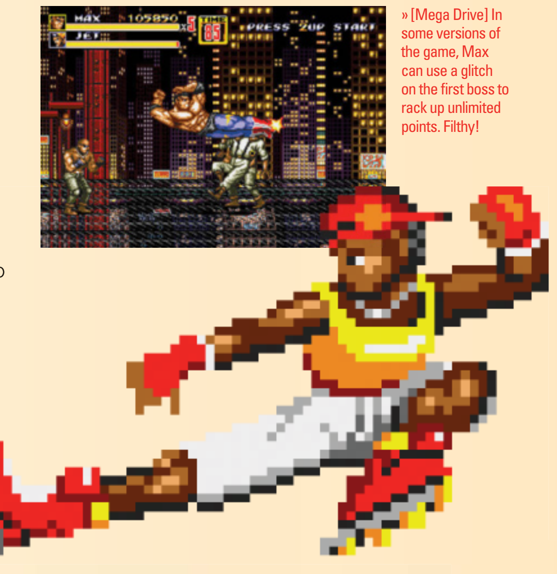
> "AYANO KOSHIRO WAS SUCH A TALENTED DESIGNER – THE SPEED SHE DREW WAS INCREDIBLY FAST"
> Mikito Ichikawa

Sega needed at the time – somebody who could see what they were trying to emulate and offer suggestions that would let the sequel expand upon the solid (if borrowed) foundations already in place and go toe-to-toe with the best in the business.

"I was mainly involved in designing the game, more for the overall gaming design decisions rather than in the details. I think it took only about a year to develop," Ichikawa responds when quizzed about team size and project duration, although there's a distinct and tragic reason for this vague recollection that extends beyond areas of project management that weren't part of his job on the game. "In the middle of the development of this game, I was diagnosed with serious illness and I cannot remember it clearly," he explains – something he elaborated on previously in an interview with GDRI, where he recalls doctors suggesting he may only have 18 months to live in the summer of 1992, becoming bed-bound a year later and dropping to just 36kg, yet managing to make an incredible recovery by early 1995. It's a miraculous and fortunate tale and while MNM was closed during his illness, it later emerged anew as Mindware, the team's focus shifting onto pinball games and interesting, genuinely original titles, which goes some way towards explaining Ichikawa's seeming disdain for a 'clone' such as the original *Streets Of Rage*.

Improvements that would elevate *Streets Of Rage* to being a unique brawler in its own right – rather than another game chasing the strong Metro City dollar – were at the top of the menu when going into creating a sequel, however, and Sega knew that the team would need more backing in order to make the leaps and bounds the series deserved. "Sales of the original *Streets Of Rage* were so good, Sega decided to put more effort into *Streets Of Rage II* and provided us with 16MB ROM," says Ichikawa, explaining how the sprites were able to be so much larger and more detailed than in the first game, not to mention significantly better animated. "Also, Ayano Koshiro was such a talented designer – the speed she drew was incredibly fast." Put the two games side-by-side and it's the most noticeable difference of all – chunky colourful sprites move with purpose and flow, injecting a real sense of personality into the cast that wasn't really there in the original game. This is furthered by the creative and vibrant





» [Mega Drive] In some versions of the game, Max can use a glitch on the first boss to rack up unlimited points. Filthy!

RAGE AGAINST THE (OLD) MACHINES

How the 8-bit versions compare to the Mega Drive masterpiece

It's fair to say that the ports to both older Sega systems fared considerably better than those of the original game. They're not identical – not should they realistically be expected to be – but both squeeze as much out of the respective systems as possible while staying true to the original game. Audio is of particular note, as Yuzo Koshiro's slamming soundtrack loses little in translation, surprisingly, while graphics retain the feel and tone brilliantly despite being pared back. Mechanics are a little less tight and can be easier to exploit and Max is absent in both versions, but let's take a look at where the Master System and Game Gear versions differ in terms of design and structure…



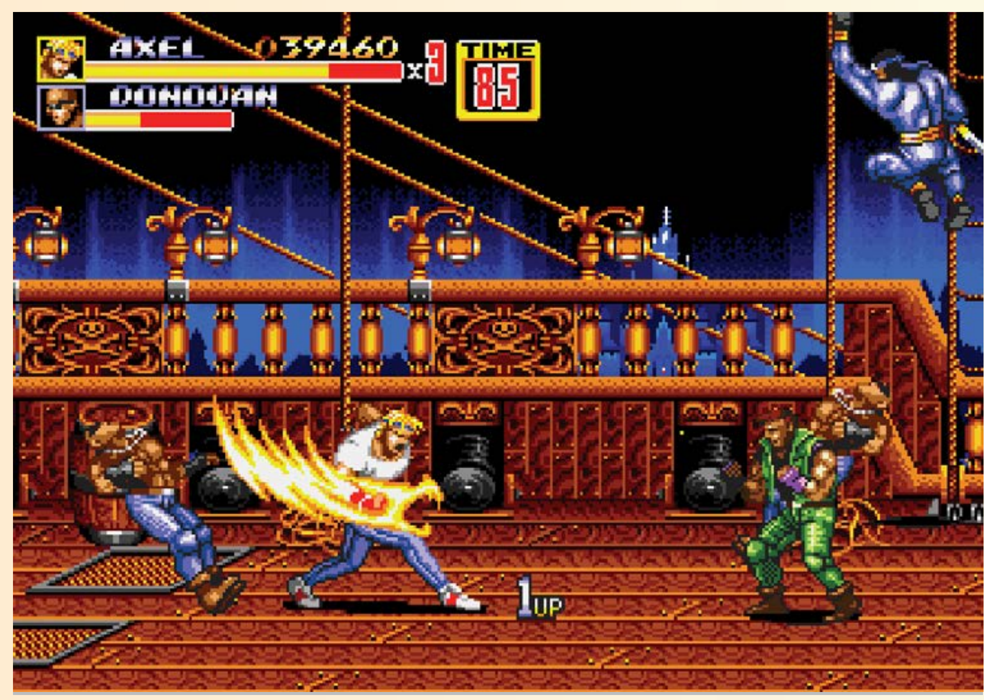
MASTER SYSTEM

As impressive as the port is, the large playfield and smaller sprites coupled with reduced detail and enemy density can make this feel a barren at times. Stage 2 keeps the bikers but loses the bridge setting in favour of a street, fighting through to a version of Mega Drive Stage 4's arena. Stage 3 is new, a subway level where the action moves onto the top of a train before reaching the docks to fight Jet, then the Ship and Factory stages are similar, while Stage 6 is a lift battle all the way to the final boss. The lack of multiplayer is a shame, however.



GAME GEAR

There's no room on the screen for thug life bars or names, but it's surprising just how well the gameplay still holds up on the portable. That said, it does lose stages – Bridge, Stadium and Coast are cut, while Theme Park is split up into two parts, the latter with a new boss in the form of a Predator-like creature. Factory is different, with annoying exploding robots and hazards to make it even tougher, although having fewer bosses during the lift ride up to Mr X is welcome. Unlike the MS version, multiplayer *is* supported via link cable play.



» [Mega Drive] When there's health on the screen that you couldn't otherwise use, you might as well burn some of your existing gauge and grab it!

> "Yuzo played a lot of Streets of Rage II, so there was a brilliant balance between the music and the gameplay"
> Mikito Ichikawa

design of the new stages, so while things like the factory, ship and mansion levels all feel like evolved versions of the old game's stages (and those in most of its forerunners, actually), there's a degree of imagination present in levels like the amusement park and the baseball-stadium-cum-underground-arena that makes it impossible to find a point of comparison and really makes the game stand out for these memorable, sometimes unexpected highlights.

All of this visual improvement was accompanied by Yuzo Koshiro – brother of Ayano Koshiro and childhood friend of Mikito Ichikawa – returning with another glorious soundtrack, once again knocking it out of the park with an amazing variety of tunes from the intense boss showdown music to the lilting closing credits theme, which won't leave our heads for weeks now that we've mentioned it. "Yuzo played a lot of *Streets Of Rage II*, so there was a brilliant balance between the music and the gameplay," Ichikawa tells us, which explains why each piece fits the setting so well and the pace and flow of the soundtrack so perfectly complements that of the action. Some tracks were remixed versions of tunes from the original game and while we'll need to reach out to Yuzo Koshiro himself – something we plan on doing in the near future – for final clarification, Ichikawa has an idea of his own as to why the composer may have gone back to his older material for inspiration. "I think because Yuzo likes to please others a lot, maybe he did it to please the fans," he suggests.



» [Mega Drive] The signs in the background are amazing – 'Do! BASE BALL!' reads the one just out of shot, which might be the best of the bunch.

Presentation certainly wasn't the only thing getting an overhaul, however, and that's clear from the moment you first pick up the controller to play *Streets Of Rage II*. For starters, when you press the A button to see what it does, you'll no longer be treated to an overly elaborate panning shot across the level to show a cop car showering the area with napalm (in the process wasting your one and only 'smart bomb', if perhaps in exchange for a few laughs if you do so inside a factory building or on a ship). Here, it's still a panic button – merely one used in a more interesting, skill-dependent manner. As in *Final Fight*, the A button unleashes a character-specific special attack that is largely invulnerable for its duration, allowing you

WHAT'S IN THE BIN?

The many treats you can find by dumpster diving and breaking boxes

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Interestingly, the order of the characters on the select screen is also the order of best potential clear times – the top Max time for Normal is 25:24, set recently by US player galedog. Axel comes in at 28:38, with Blaze just behind at 29:58 (both also set by galedog). Nobody bothers to run with Skate as he's so weak.









GOLD BARS

■ This is just silly. Still, if you're lucky enough to find actual gold bullion by breaking crates, barrels and bins at random, you probably deserve a healthy score boost… let's say around 5,000 points. Sound fair? Good, because that's what you're getting.

KNIFE

■ It might seem good when those annoying little AI grunts are running left and right stabbing everything in sight but in reality, the knife is the worst melee weapon. Use it only to whittle health down on distant enemies by chucking it (press B+C at the same time), which also prevents enemies from getting their hands on them.

PIPE

■ Great damage, good range and it even hits enemies behind as well as in front when used by Max. The extra range alone would make this worth picking up, but the hard knockdowns it delivers also help buy time and get your breath back between onslaughts.



1-UP

■ The rarest of all pick-ups, this physical manifestation of the concept of life itself grants you an extra try, making it a little easier to avoid having to continue as doing so resets your score. While rare in the wild, there are three guaranteed 1-Up drops, as you'll discover elsewhere in this feature…

MONEY BAG

■ If you thought tossing out an entire family meal was wasteful, how about entire labeled bags of money? This city really is a mess. Collecting this purse will give your score a modest boost of 1,000 points, plus the i-frames while picking it up can help avoid damage in some cases.



CHICKEN

■ According to videogames, there's only one thing tastier than regular chicken, and that's bin chicken. Devouring this entire disposed roast in under a second will fully restore your health, or that of your co-op 'buddy', who will inevitably steal it when you need it most.



APPLE

■ This piece of fruit looks surprisingly fresh and rosy considering someone has apparently deemed it trash. Oh well. Chowing down on this will give you a slight health boost (around 25 per cent), while simultaneously lowering your self-esteem considerably.

KUNAI

■ Just another version of the knife really, meaning you shouldn't go out of your way to grab one of these unless you need to dent or finish off an enemy on the other side of the screen by chucking it at them. Pretty awful, but mercifully rare.

SWORD

■ An even better version of the pipe, but far less common as a result. The sword is comfortably the best weapon in the game, so hang onto it for as long as you can – drop it three times and it'll be gone for good, so try to keep your co-op partner in check!

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Expert tips for reaching and defeating Mr X as efficiently as possible



TAKING A FALL

■ When thrown by an enemy, you can hold up and jump at the same time to land safe and sound without taking any damage at all. This only works with toss throws like those Signal and Barbon use, not slams or suplexes so you'll still need to avoid those as usual.

HEY, THAT'S CHEATING!

■ On the title menu, press and hold A and B on a second controller and hit Start on controller one to select Options. This will unlock both the Very Easy and Mania difficulty levels, allow you to stock up to nine lives and let you start on any stage – perfect for practicing ones you often have trouble with!



SCORE ATTACK

■ In addition to the usual named goons and bosses that appear on your journey, you'll occasionally find uniquely-named enemies. Keep an eye out for these, as each is worth a 10,000 point bonus and some can be missed. There's at least one in every level, with the exception of Stage 5.

I'M INVINCIBLE!

■ Many animations have a number of frames during which the character is immune, and this applies to both player characters and enemies, particularly bosses. Special and blitz attacks have invulnerability (although rising, throws and picking up items also have i-frames) so use these to escape danger.

THREE FREE LIVES

■ Hidden in the first three stages is a trio of 1-Ups that will make clearing the game easier. The first is on the first screen, in the bottom-left corner. The second is in the top-left corner after leaving the truck on Stage 2. Finally, there's one behind the foreground in Stage 3's Alien House, below where you fight Vehelits.



C-C-C-COMBO BREAKER!

■ Mashing the attack button is a mug's game – smart timing can make your life easier. Rather than perform the final hit of your standard combo, delay the attack. Many opponents will stay in hitstun long enough for you to start a new combo, a process you can usually repeat to easily kill isolated powerful enemies.

FRIENDLY FIRE

■ Score-chasers will want to be wary of knocking foes into one another. While a great way to deal additional damage while playing casually, you don't actually score for damage done to enemies in this way, effectively eroding points that you could otherwise have earned.



MAX POINTS

■ The trick to scoring big with Max is the Atomic Drop, triggered by grabbing an enemy from behind, jumping and pressing the attack button. During the throw, mashing the attack button adds extra points, making it an amazing way to top the leaderboards once you can consistently set it up.

to escape from being cornered, sandwiched or hit with a powerful move at the cost of a small chunk of your life bar. In addition, each character also has a directional variant that functions differently. Axel's is a long flurry of blows best suited for finishing off lone bosses, for instance, while Max's tackle lets him cover great distances while trampling everything in his path. On top of these (and other improvements to combat, including individual movesets and throw options on a per-character basis), there are blitz moves activated by double-tapping a direction and hitting B – Axel's Grand Upper is perhaps the best known of these thanks for just how effective it is to use and abuse, but each character's version of this new type of special attack is extremely good in the right situation. It just so happens that 'the right situation' for using Grand Upper is 'whenever there's an enemy on the screen'. Ken players in *Street Fighter II* onwards will surely be able to relate to that.

"At an early stage, we were already convinced that *Street Fighter* would be popular, therefore we were sure that if we added *Street Fighter*-style special moves to *Streets Of Rage*, the rhythm of the gameplay would improve," reasons Ichikawa on these new introductions to the combat arsenal and refining the fighting system as a whole. "We concentrated mainly on the rhythm of the gameplay and on adjusting the timings between the characters, balancing between the importance of one-on-one fighting and fights against lots of enemies." The new moves play into this design ethos perfectly, giving players the tools to deal with whatever situations may arise provided they have the skill to do so. Powerful as Axel's A button barrage may be, using it when multiple enemies are



» [Mega Drive] Lift sections are a cornerstone of the genre, and *Streets Of Rage II* has no less that three!



» [Mega Drive] The two-player competitive mode is somewhat throwaway, but it's fun in small doses.

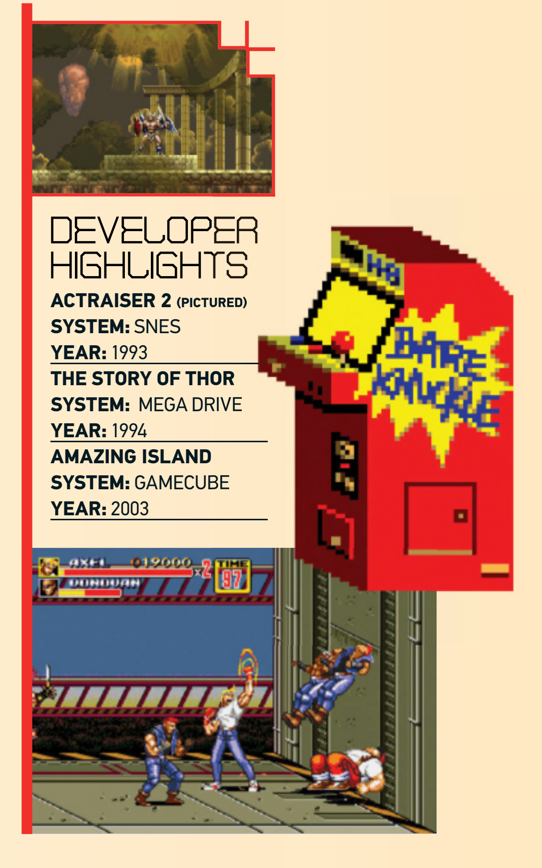
around is a sure-fire way to get punched or kicked in the back, and similarly, area attacks will barely dent chunky bosses who are far easier to deal with using moves clearly designed to focus down a single target. It all comes together to add a degree of depth to the combat that simply wasn't there in the original game, nor even in most of its peers – there's more nuance and variety to the fighting system than even in *Final Fight*, although arguments about which is the better game still rage to this day.

Well, when talking about the arcade version, at least. When it finally arrived, the SNES port of Capcom's genre-defining hit wasn't quite the slam dunk Sega had feared and Nintendo would have hoped. Visuals took a bit of a hit but more pressingly, co-op play, a playable character and one of the game's stages all had to be removed to get the game running and while it was still *good*, Sega didn't really have all that much to fear with its own equivalent series gearing up to drop *Streets Of Rage II*, one of the greatest sequels of all time. Somewhat ironically, the Mega-CD port of *Final Fight* actually turned out to be one of the best shortly afterward, although the arcade classic that once may have fueled sales for the Mega Drive's disc-based peripheral had already been scuppered by a rival of Sega's own creation on the base console. Double irony backfire. Still, it might have been too late for a traditional beat-'em-up to be counted on to save *anything* that wasn't a mayor's daughter or missing friend by that point. "From a sales point of view, the timing was vital," says Ichikawa in discussion of *Streets Of Rage II*'s success. "I think if it was sold a year earlier, the game would be a lot different and if it was sold a year later, the Genesis market would have been a lot smaller."

Despite his serious health issues at the time, Ichikawa still seems to be able to look back relatively fondly on his time working on the game, especially when reminded that his hard work and that of the teams around him will never be forgotten – as concretely proven by things like *Streets Of Rage II* repeatedly popping up as one of the greatest Mega Drive games of all time within these very pages, whether when voted for by readers or by a committee of experts. "I am extremely pleased with this result," he states happily when we tell him this. "I devoted myself to developing the game at that time, so this makes me very happy." And when asked why he thinks it is that the game has such a passionate



» [Mega Drive] The speed of the bikers can cause the slower characters some problems, but Blaze does fine…



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ACTRAISER 2 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1993

THE STORY OF THOR
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1994

AMAZING ISLAND
SYSTEM: GAMECUBE
YEAR: 2003

TAKING THE FIGHT TO THE THIRD DIMENSION

M2 reveals how it converted Streets Of Rage II to the 3DS

How difficult was *Streets Of Rage II* to convert to 3D compared to the original?
So far, we had converted *Streets Of Rage II* to Xbox 360 and Wii, but this 3DS version was the toughest. The background images drawn were based on the data capacity of Mega Drive, which was not suitable for the 3DS's stereoscopic view at all. When we started this project at first, we thought there would be no chance that we would be able to create a 3D version of *Streets Of Rage II*. But while we developed *SOR* for 3DS, we built up the experience we needed that allowed us to convert it to the console, so we felt confident we could draw up a plan for the 3DS version of *SORII*. If we didn't convert *SOR* for 3DS, a converstion of the sequel probably would never have happened. It wasn't just the technicalities of getting the visuals right, though, recreating the music that was composed by Yuzo Koshiro was also tough work! His composition method used techniques that were unique specifically to the Mega Drive, so it was much more difficult to convert compared to most other game music. We did our best on the Wii and Xbox 360 versions, and for the 3DS version, we invited Mr Manabu Namiki to come on board as the sound director. Thanks to his technical skills, we achieved a great recreation of the *Streets Of Rage II* music.

Where did the idea for the credits gag reel originate?
For the credits, originally, we planned to create something as cool as the one we created for *3D Space Harrier*. But when we developed *Streets Of Rage*, we tried to create something funny where all the characters get together, we had a lot of feedback from players, so we wanted to adopt this kind of direction for other titles. However, we were careful to pay attention in not offending fans of the original version when we developed it.

What do you feel the 3D offers the game?
It seems players love to have some nostalgia when they play the retro games, such as virtual console titles, but we believe the *3D Classic* series can offer a fresh experience by giving users a new sense of wonder. There must be the new 3D experience while keeping the same gameplay feeling of the original 2D versions, it needs to be familiar to the players while offering a new perspective on a classic game. In the case of a shooting game like *Space Harrier*, where you play the game in a 3D open space, in an action game which has the perspective line of *Streets Of Rage*, the gameplay is more accessible. When you dodge the enemy's bullet, you can stay as close as possible. You also easily can hit the enemy to match up with the enemy's position line. Though the gameplay feeling is same, this difference may give the impression that you have become the more skilful player.

Why did you add Rage Relay and Fists Of Death?
Streets Of Rage is a good game, but the only problem was the long gameplay time, so we implemented 'Fists Of Death' mode, and it was well received. But in case of *Streets Of Rage II*, the fun element is the game's combo system, so if we implemented the Fists Of Death mode, just like *Streets Of Rage*, we thought it would jeopardise the fun of gameplay, so we tweaked the mode for *Streets Of Rage II*. As for 'Rage Relay', we thought a fair number of players use just one character, even though there were total of four different characters, each of which who have different characteristics. So, we prepared Rage Relay to give a chance to the players to play as the other characters in the game, so that they could find out the different fun elements of each of the characters.

***Streets Of Rage II* finished at 18 in our Top 150 Games Of All Time List, earning the title of best beat-'em-up. Why do you think people consider *Streets Of Rage II* to be the best scrolling fighter?**
When the original *Streets Of Rage* was developed, it was the transition period from scrolling fighter game to traditional fighting games. The original development staffs of Ancient Corp were very fond of *Street Fighter II*, so I assume the various action movements of the character and game fun elements are the result of aiming for the essence of the fighting game, but in a scrolling beat-'em-up.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

A tourist's guide to the eight stages of Streets Of Rage II



STAGE 1: BACK ALLEYS

■ The seedy underbelly of a city wracked by crime is the starting point for pretty much every scrolling fighter ever made, and *Streets Of Rage II* is no exception. Filled with weak enemies to help you get used to the game's systems and more health pick-ups than you should really need, it's a great introduction to the game.



BOSS: BARBON

■ As the first end-of-level baddie, Barbon naturally isn't too much of a threat. His throw can be safely recovered from, plus you needn't fight him until you're ready – keep your distance at the start of the fight and you'll be able to deal with his minions before he even takes an interest in you.



STAGE 2: BRIDGE

■ Taking to literal streets in the battle for justice is always going to have its perils, notably in this case the gangs of bikers free to charge up and down the bridge until you knock them off their surprisingly explosive motorcycles. The truck in the middle of the stage offers a nice respite, however.



BOSS: R. BEAR

■ While this boxer may look like a *Punch-Out!!* reject, don't let his looks distract you from the fact that he's as beastly as his name suggests. He's agile, so stay on the move and punish his bigger moves. If he grabs you, hit A to special your way out – you'll deal damage and take far less than you do if you eat the whole thing.



STAGE 4: CARGO SHIP

■ Enemy density is really cranked up a few notches from this nautical stage onwards, which becomes even more noticeable with two players. As such, attacks that can hit multiple foes easily – such as long weapons and blitz attacks – will be even more useful, provided you can keep your sea legs…



BOSS: ABADEDE

■ As a burly wrestler, Abadede naturally does most damage with throws, although his rushing clothesline also hurts a lot. Don't try to combo him or he'll flex and knock you away – instead, land a few decent hits before retreating to a safe mid-distance spot and waiting for your next opening.



STAGE 6: COAST

■ Starting out with a lush beach backdrop before heading inland into Mr X's main base of operations, this stage is a nice natural change of pace and tone after so many urban levels. The goons won't let you just kick back and chill under the setting sun, though, so you'll still need to be on your toes.



BOSS: SOUTHER & STEALTH

■ Or, as we know them, Zamza and Jet. Combining two (or more, at higher difficulties) of the more annoying bosses in one fight can be every bit as frustrating as it sounds, but fight the Zamza clone as before while moving to avoid the flying dude as best you can. Drop Souther and the fight ends instantly.



STAGE 7: FACTORY

■ Quite why Mr X needs such an elaborate production facility is never made clear, although the bosses here might suggest he's looking to trade up his squishy gang for an army of robots. Conveyors are annoying, so steer clear as best you can, while tossing enemies onto them to manipulate crowds.



BOSS: JET

■ This flying foe can be one of the more annoying bosses if he decides to stay airborne. Dodge vertically when he comes swooping in to close distance quickly, and make the most of every opportunity to do damage while watching out for his throw. On higher difficulties, Jet may bring back-up – kill the boss first to end the fight early.



STAGE 3: THEME PARK

■ This one is, if you'll excuse the pun, something of a rollercoaster. It's all over the place, from park grounds to pirate ships to alien bases, each area with its own different feel and challenges. The alien area at the end is the highlight, although it's also the toughest section, with two bosses almost back to back.



STAGE 4: STADIUM

■ Nowhere in the city is safe from this crime wave, and even the city's baseball park has been overrun! What's worse, those enterprising thugs have even gone as far as to create a secret base beneath the pitching mound, complete with its very own fighting arena! Get in there and show them who's boss…



BOSS: ZAMZA

■ After dealing with Vehelits (stay at the side of the screen and hit the head when it comes close), you'll reach this nuisance. He's mobile, powerful and the game's first real test of skill. Watch for his uppercut as he's getting up as it has a lot of invincibility and try to bait him into jumping close while you keep moving.



BOSS: MOLECULE & PARTICLE

■ This pair of robots like to leap around and use ball-and-chain attacks (which come with the best sound effect in the game – 'Bonk!'), but they're not all that tough. Just be sure that when they get low on health, you finish them quickly. If you don't, they'll attempt to self-destruct, and that's going to hurt…



STAGE 8: MANSION

■ After taking in (and destroying) all the finery the crime lord surrounds himself with, you've got a long lift ride to look forward to. You won't get lonely, though – pretty much every boss from the rest of the game will drop in to keep you company. There are no health pick-ups here, but you'll recover a little life after each wave instead.

BOSS: MR X

■ After his bodyguard Shiva goes down (use specials and blitz attacks, as he counters combos), the big bad himself will leap up and come at you himself. He only has two attacks – a hail of bullets which you should jump, special and blitz past to the safe area behind him and a melee strike he uses when you stay on him for too long. Bait the gunfire, get behind him and do your worst, all while dealing with the near-constant flow of fresh enemies.





» [Mega Drive] Mr X is significantly easier with two players, one to smack him around and one to deal with his legions of goons.

▶ and enduring following, Ichikawa seems to have a fair idea: "I believe it is because players were very satisfied with the outstanding personality of the characters, the good speed of the game play, the graphics and the high level of sound quality."

Alas, as kind as the years have been to *Streets Of Rage II* (to the degree that few games from the era have aged so gracefully, we'd argue), they've not been quite so good to the series as a whole. *Streets Of Rage III* made numerous questionable changes to the near-perfect formula set out by its forebear which, coupled with a late arrival on the eve of a new generation, didn't do it any favours at retail despite it being yet another brilliant showcase for the Mega Drive's technology. And that, sadly, is where the saga ends. Despite multiple attempts to revive the franchise – which have varied in investment from all the way from playable (early PlayStation title *Fighting Force* was planned as a new *Streets Of Rage* title only for Sega to pull out at the last minute… which, in hindsight, was probably for the best) to never getting past the concept stage – on Saturn, Dreamcast and even as recently as last generation, nothing has come to fruition. We continue to live in hope, but one huge question hangs over any possible revival of the franchise – if Sega were to ever bring it back, would it actually be able to produce something better than the genuine masterpiece that is *Streets Of Rage II*? Somehow, we doubt it. *



NES NOW EVEN SMALLER

What better way to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the NES than by putting it back on store shelves? Luke Albigés and Nick Thorpe revisit the 30 awesome games you'll be playing when the Nintendo Classics Mini: NES launches later this year…

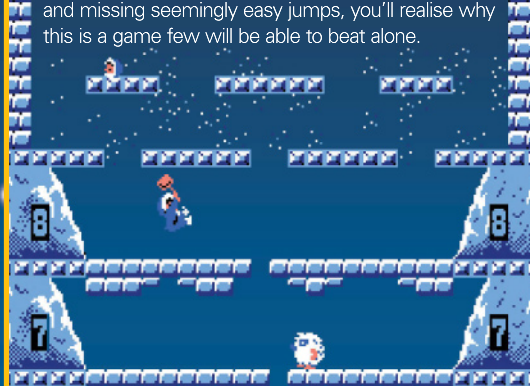


ICE CLIMBER

SMASH THE SYSTEM

NINTENDO, 1985

One of the most interesting characters in the *Smash Bros.* roster, Ice Climbers were based on the idea of having both co-op clamberers work as a single unit, and it worked brilliantly. Co-op is undoubtedly the best way to enjoy *Ice Climber*, as you're able to make far quicker progress through the various floors as a duo than alone. It doesn't seem tricky at first but as soon as you start slipping around and missing seemingly easy jumps, you'll realise why this is a game few will be able to beat alone.



DONKEY KONG JR.

FATHER KNOWS BEST



NINTENDO, 1987

In a role reversal of the original *Donkey Kong*, this acrobatic adventure sends DK's son off to rescue his old man from the clutches of Mario, the goodie-two-shoes Nintendo mascot's only antagonistic role, no less. As an arcade game first and foremost, it's frustratingly difficult at times – minimal fall damage is enough for the young Kong to lose a life, for instance, and the fact that the kill screen kicks in at level 22 tells you exactly how far you should expect to get. Interestingly, the white vest suggests that this is the version of *Donkey Kong* that is playable in the original *Super Mario Kart*.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

PLUMBING ISSUES

Five ways to tell this ain't your ordinary Mario adventure

NINTENDO, 1988

FOUR PLAYABLE CHARACTERS

■ You can tell something is amiss as soon as you're given the option to choose between Mario, Luigi, Peach and Toad. Each plays differently, making them better suited for certain stages or challenges than others.



LONGER STAGES

■ The beauty of *Mario* lies in the brevity of its stages, the satisfaction from reaching the flagpole unscathed. By comparison, *SMB2*'s levels are quite long, with hidden areas and branching paths. It's not a bad thing per se, just different.



FEELING FLOATY

■ It's most noticeable when you pick someone like Luigi, but the core control systems just don't feel anywhere near as tight as they do in the other two NES Mario games. It's almost as if this was never meant to be a *Mario* game in the first place…



IT'S NOT A MARIO GAME

■ As most people know, the version of *SMB2* we got in the west is a rejigged version of platformer *Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic* – Nintendo's actual *Super Mario Bros. 2* is what we now know as *The Lost Levels*.

THROW WEEDS EVERY DAY

■ The game involves picking stuff up and throwing them, which might come as a shock to those used to bouncing on Goombas. Turnips, potions, POW blocks and even enemies and some projectiles can be grabbed and chucked.



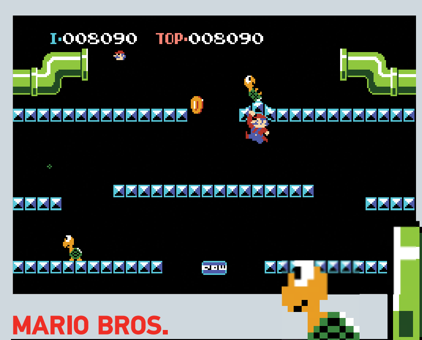






FIRST-PARTY CLASSICS

Some of the included games are classics – they need no introduction



MARIO BROS.

NINTENDO, 1983

■ While the original Mario game was *technically* a port, the fact that the arcade and Famicom versions came out within two months of each other means it's just as much a NES game in spirit. A simple single-screen battle of plumber-versus-pest, it's perhaps the sole example we have of Nintendo's mascot actually doing his job.

METROID

NINTENDO, 1986

■ Samus' debut adventure helped create an entire genre, one where exploration was crucial and previously inaccessible areas may be reached later once the requisite powers have been obtained. Games like *Dark Souls* are lauded today for eschewing hand-holding and promoting exploration – things *Metroid* was doing 30 years ago.

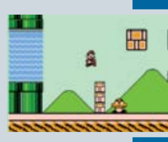
SUPER MARIO BROS.



NINTENDO, 1985

■ The classic platformer needs no introduction – it popularised the scrolling platformer, made waves with its great music and presentation and served to launch the career of Nintendo's mustachioed mascot. Speedrunners have clocked the game in under five minutes… how quickly can *you* clear *SMB*?

SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



NINTENDO, 1988

■ A perennial NES favourite, thanks in no small part to some exceptional level design, an open-plan structure and production values that few other titles on the system can rival. Some consider it the best game in the entire series – an argument that certainly carries weight, as it's just as enjoyable today as it was at launch.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



NINTENDO, 1986

■ The origins of Nintendo's classic action-RPG series may look completely alien to those who joined the party amid the *Ocarina Of Time* hype bonanza, but those who loved *Link's Awakening* and *A Link To The Past* owe it to themselves to see where the seeds for those amazing games were first sown.

ARCADE HITS

The Classic Mini features conversions of some coin-op classics – here's how they fare on the 8-bit machine



BUBBLE BOBBLE

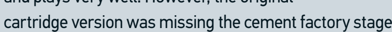
TAITO, 1988

■ While the visuals are a little less colourful, this conversion of Taito's single-screen platformer plays very accurately and has 12 extra stages. There's also a nice password system to help you get through the game's large number of screens. This was a good conversion at the time, and that's still true.

DONKEY KONG

NINTENDO, 1983

■ As is to be expected of a flagship Nintendo game, *Donkey Kong* looks good and plays very well. However, the original cartridge version was missing the cement factory stage – Nintendo has since produced an updated NES version that restores it, but we don't know if it's being used for this system yet.



GALAGA

NAMCO, 1985

■ This is solid conversion work from Namco, as the game features some odd sprite colouring but plays very faithfully to the arcade original. Interestingly, the game no longer ends at level 256. If you're a fan of the game but never played the NES version, this conversion will still serve you well.

GRADIUS

KONAMI, 1986

■ One of the less accurate conversions here due to the limitations of the NES, *Gradius* features simplified visuals and some slight mechanical changes such as a limit of two Option drones. Taken on its own merits, it's still a good shoot-'em-up with a lot of nostalgic appeal for NES fans who picked it up back in the day.

PAC-MAN

NAMCO, 1984

■ As you'd expect, the NES handled a simple game like *Pac-Man* very well. It's not quite arcade perfect, mind – the colours are a little different to the coin-op, the maze is slightly smaller and there's no kill screen. However, in every other respect this is an accurate conversion of Namco's classic maze game.

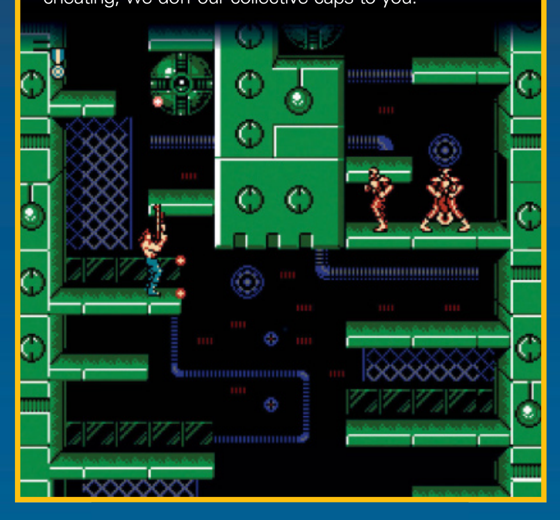
SUPER C

PROBOTECT THIS!

KONAMI, 1990



Back in the Eighties and early Nineties, the *Contra* series was in the middle of an identity crisis. But whether you know it as *Probotector, Contra, Gryzor* or indeed something as abstract as *Super C* (as this sequel is called), the action is all the same even though the names might be different wherever you go – walk right (running is a schoolboy error, as it triggers more enemies than you'll comfortably be able to deal with) and blast the crap out of anything that moves, and most things that don't. This series has a reputation for being difficult and *Super C* lives up to it. In fact, it's so hard that it feels like the off *Alien*-inspired later levels are a joke you were never really meant to see. If you can reach that point without cheating, we doff our collective caps to you.



DR. MARIO

PILLS FOR YOUR ADDICTION?



NINTENDO, 1990



Every compilation of games needs a good puzzle game, and Gunpei Yokoi's exploration of Mario's extra-curricular bacteria-busting exploits is one of the best choices on the NES. Unlike most falling block puzzles, which rely on you to provide both the problem and the solution, Dr. Mario tasks you with using pills to eliminate viruses that start off on the playfield. This instantly sets the game apart from *Tetris, Puyo Puyo* and *Columns*.

You can take on the game solo or play competitively against a second player – in the latter case, you can hinder your opponent with junk pills. In either case, the game has all the hallmarks of a top-quality puzzler, with good potential for combos, neat incidental animations and iconic music that will bore its way into your subconscious and pester you for weeks.

ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK

I AM ERROR

Divisive? Yes. Awful? Far from it…

NINTENDO, 1987

It's easy to hate on *Zelda II*, but that's primarily because it's just so different to the rest of the core *Legend Of Zelda* series. There are worse games that carry the name – the CD-i releases, for instance, are laughably poor, while *The Adventure Of Link* actually shows the development team pushing and pulling in interesting directions arguably more so than any other mainline entry in the series has since. It's all about exploration, with separate side-on and overhead used for action screens and map navigation respectively. While the combat never feels particularly good, this is a great example of open world design leading to player freedom and it's worth playing again, if only to make up your own mind about it.



EXCITEBIKE

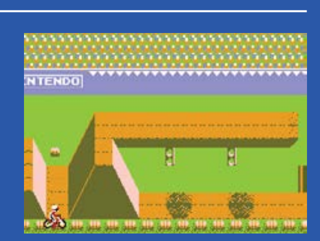
THREE WHEELS?!

Triple the options, triple the fun

NINTENDO, 1984







GAME A

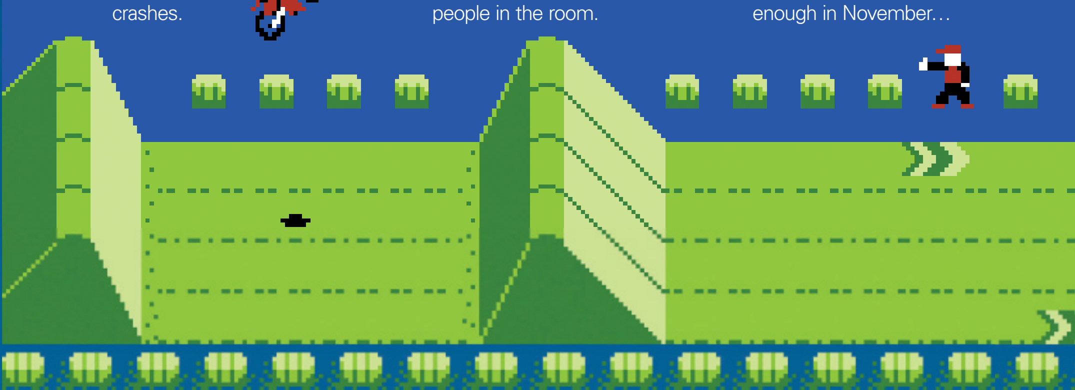
A pure time-attack mode where it's rider versus obstacles against the clock – beat the best time to proceed to the next stage. Angling your bike is key to success, as poorly-executed jumps can slow you down to a crawl or even result in costly crashes.

GAME B

Rival racers join the fray here, making switching lanes at the right time a crucial skill to master, choose your time wrong and it's boom town for you. There's more room for mistakes here, thanks to the fact that AI riders can crash out at any time, but it's a fun option if you need visible competition to wow the other people in the room.

DESIGN MODE

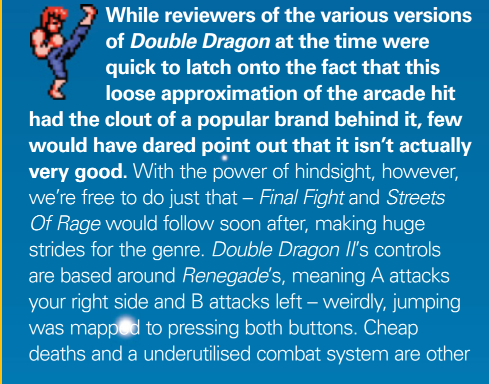
Create your own perfect motocross course out of the various jumps and hazards available, then see how you fare in the other two game modes. Sadly, course saving wasn't possible in previous non-computer disk versions – will that be fixed for the NES Mini version? We'll find out soon enough in November…



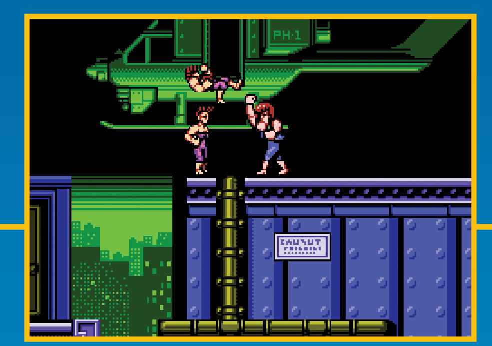
DOUBLE DRAGON II: THE REVENGE

WHEN BILLY MET JIMMY (AGAIN)

TECHNOS, 1989



While reviewers of the various versions of *Double Dragon* at the time were quick to latch onto the fact that this loose approximation of the arcade hit had the clout of a popular brand behind it, few would have dared point out that it isn't actually very good. With the power of hindsight, however, we're free to do just that – *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage* would follow soon after, making huge strides for the genre. *Double Dragon II*'s controls are based around *Renegade*'s, meaning A attacks your right side and B attacks left – weirdly, jumping was mapped to pressing both buttons. Cheap deaths and a underutilised combat system are other notable sources of frustration. Thumb and mental gymnastics aside, though, *Double Dragon II: The Revenge* is impressive given the constraints of the NES system, and it finally introduced a two-player mode, just don't expect a scrolling fighter that can go toe-to-toe with any of the big boys of the genre.



PUNCH-OUT!!

MEET THE CONTENDERS

Punch-Out!! is back, but it's missing a cover star

NINTENDO, 1987



The version of *Punch-Out!!* you'll play on the Nintendo Classic Mini: NES will be the one featuring 'Mr Dream' rather than 'Iron' Mike Tyson – but, realistically, his absence shouldn't matter too much. The appeal of the game was always based on its excellent gameplay and a great cast of original characters. Here's a refresher on your opponents…



GLASS JOE

■ This guy is a wimp with a 1-99 record. His signature move is the 'Taunt Punch', which says everything you need to know.



VON KAISER

■ A former boxing instructor for the military, this German fighter is past his prime. When he shakes his head, he's about to strike.



PISTON HONDA

■ Japan's Minor Circuit champion hits hard, but has a soft defence. Watch out for his patented 'Piston Rush' combo.



DON FLAMENCO

■ The Spanish dancer is a bit of a one-trick pony – he'll bait you into attacking and respond with a devastating uppercut.



KING HIPPO

■ Gargantuan doesn't begin to describe this tribal leader. Attack when his mouth is open, and take advantage of his loose shorts.



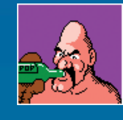
GREAT TIGER

■ India's premier boxer is aided by his magic powers of teleportation. Watch for the ruby in his turban – if it glows, he'll strike.



BALD BULL

■ The Istanbul native is capable of sending Little Mac to the canvas with a single 'Bull Rush'. Uppercuts are effective against him.



SODA POPINSKI

■ Kicking the booze has ticked off the former Vodka Drunkenski, as he's a formidable World Circuit opponent.



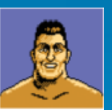
MR SANDMAN

■ With strong rolling jabs and the 'Dreamland Express', this competitor is easily capable of putting you to sleep.



SUPER MACHO MAN

■ The Hollywood bodybuilder fights like an even more ferocious Soda Popinski, which is bad news for Little Mac.



MR DREAM

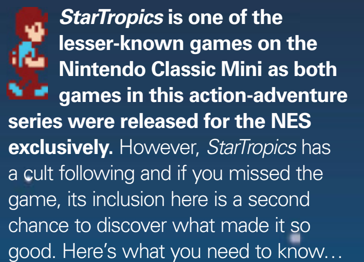
■ He's your waking nightmare – a terrifying pugilist who can floor you instantly during the first 90 seconds of a fight.

STARTROPICS

10 ESSENTIAL STARTROPICS FACTS

Discover what sets this cult classic apart from the crowd

NINTENDO, 1990



***StarTropics* is one of the lesser-known games on the Nintendo Classic Mini as both games in this action-adventure series were released for the NES exclusively.** However, *StarTropics* has a cult following and if you missed the game, its inclusion here is a second chance to discover what made it so good. Here's what you need to know…



1 **Your protagonist Mike isn't a 'Chosen One' and he doesn't have special powers – he's an ordinary kid from Seattle.**

2 The goal of the game is to find out how and why Mike's uncle, Dr Steven Jones, has been abducted.

3 **Mike's primary weapon is a yo-yo, which he throws with incredible force because he's an ace baseball pitcher.**

4 Additional items are themed around baseball too – you can pick up bats, balls and even spiked shoes.

5 **The setting for the game is a chain of sunny tropical islands, rather than a typical European-style feudal kingdom.**

6 The original release came packaged with a letter that set up the game's story, which had to be dipped into water to reveal a vital code.

7 **You get not only a health bar, but a few lives with which to clear each of the game's dungeon areas.**

8 While overworlds have typical tiny RPG sprites, *StarTropics*' action scenes are graphically rather gorgeous.

9 **The game was directed by *Punch-Out!!* director Genyo Takeda, and has much of his trademark humour.**

10 The music had some bugs in the original release, which fans have managed to fix – but they may persist on Classic Mini version.

KIRBY'S ADVENTURE

THINK PINK

Kirby can mimic the abilities of his enemies in this charming classic

HAL LABORATORY, 1993

FIRE

TORNADO

FIREBALL

CUTTER

LASER

NEEDLE

SLEEP

SWORD

WHEEL

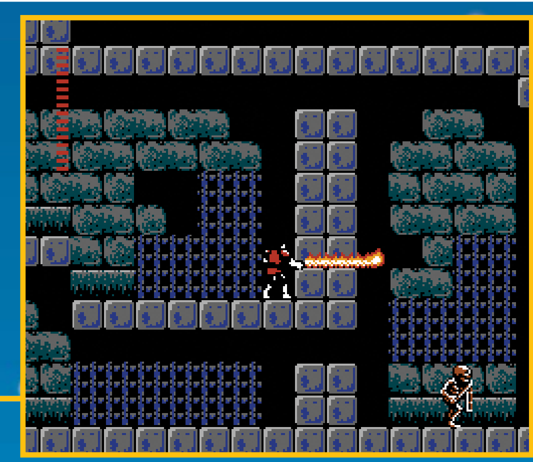
SPARK

CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST

WHAT A HORRIBLE NIGHT…

KONAMI, 1987

Dracula's second coming serves as a strange piece of foreshadowing, a game not especially well-received at the time but one instrumental in establishing non-linear game design as a viable option alongside games like *Metroid* – the modern moniker of 'Metroidvania' owes more to this game than to the original *Castlevania*, that's for sure. Progress can be tough and the poor translation means that clues on how to move forward are often lost, muddied or misleading, one section in particular being obscure to the point of ridicule. Combat is still pretty enjoyable, but don't expect to finish this without a guide.





KID ICARUS

MEET THE COMEBACK KID



NINTENDO, 1986

Ten years ago, a device like the Nintendo Classic Mini: NES could easily have made it to the shelves without *Kid Icarus* being included. Although the NES game is a cult hit, the series spent a good two decades in a dormant state after the release of the Game Boy sequel *Kid Icarus: Of Myths And Monsters*. However, in modern times Nintendo has made quite an effort to revive *Kid Icarus* and its hero, Pit, with inclusions in the high profile *Super Smash Bros.* series and a 3DS sequel.

The game itself is a platformer with an unusual twist, as many of the game's levels don't scroll horizontally. Instead, they scroll vertically and wrap around horizontally, allowing Pit to exit the right side of the screen to reappear on the left. It also provides an early example of character development, with Pit gaining equipment and health – but only if he earns enough experience, in the form of points, to use them.

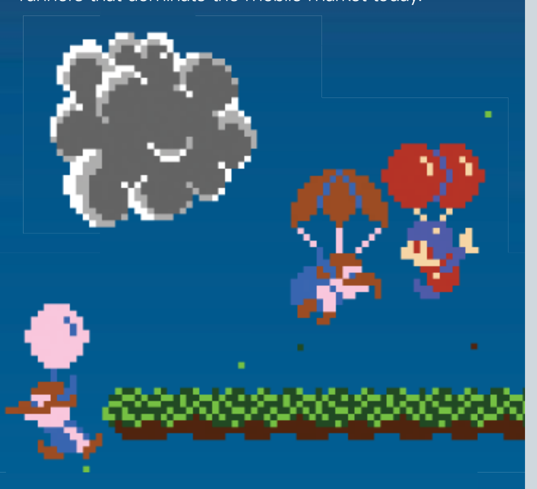
BALLOON FIGHT

ACCOUNTING FOR INFLATION

NINTENDO, 1985



While mechanically quite similar to *Joust, Balloon Fight* is an early glimpse into the colourful and family-friendly world of Nintendo games in general. Incorporating remaining 'lives' into the player character with unpopped balloons was a masterstroke of game design (and one that *Mario Kart*'s battle mode uses to this day), with the added pressure of negotiating a screen of enemies with only one inflatable miraculously holding you in the air a stressful, yet satisfying, experience. Balloon Trip mode is perhaps even more tense and rewarding than the main game, not to mention it being a precursor to the many endless runners that dominate the mobile market today.





TECMO BOWL

"NOBODY CATCHES BO – TOUCHDOWN!"

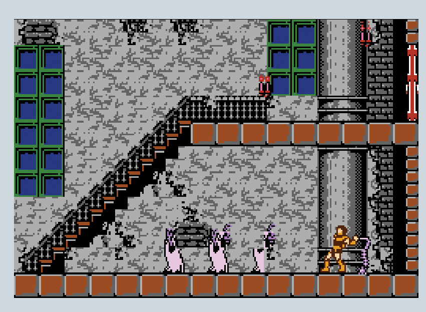
TECMO, 1989

An old sports game might seem like an odd inclusion in a package like this, but this multiplayer classic still resonates with a big fanbase – so much so that modders still release annual roster updates for the game. Tecmo Bowl isn't a simulation in the same way that the likes of *John Madden Football* were – each team is limited to nine on-field players and a playbook containing just four plays. The simplified arcade gameplay is a big reason for the enduring appeal of the game, though, as it strips back what can be a pretty complex and daunting sport for the uninitiated.

If you want a quick advantage, we would recommend you start out with the LA Raiders. The team contains Bo Jackson, an extraordinary athlete who competed in both the NFL and Major League Baseball – his running speed is incredible and you'll evade defenders with ease.

THIRD-PARTY CLASSICS

Titles from other teams hold their own just as well as the ones from Nintendo



CASTLEVANIA

KONAMI, 1986

■ The saga of Belmont versus Dracula started right here, with this side-scrolling gothic adventure that features near-constant nods to classic horror literature. As tough as it is, the NES original is still great fun. Take things slow, don't get cocky and you might – *might* – just survive the ordeal.

FINAL FANTASY

SQUARE, 1987

■ Whether or not you believe the story that it was so named as it was apparently Square's last-ditch effort to hit the big time, the original *Final Fantasy* is worth experiencing if only to see how the series grew and evolved. Early games were slow-paced and grind-heavy, which won't prove to everyone's tastes.



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

CAPCOM, 1986

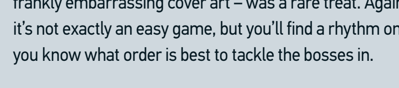
■ Capcom's tough action coin-op found a home for itself on the NES, alongside equally brutal games such as *Contra* and *Battletoads*. Even when you think you've mastered it, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* has one last trick up its sleeve, sending you back to the start to run the entire gauntlet again in search of the true ending.



MEGA MAN 2

CAPCOM, 1988

■ In an era where misleading boxart could end in severe disappointment, finding a game like *Mega Man 2* – where the colourful sprite work was actually way better than the frankly embarrassing cover art – was a rare treat. Again, it's not exactly an easy game, but you'll find a rhythm once you know what order is best to tackle the bosses in.

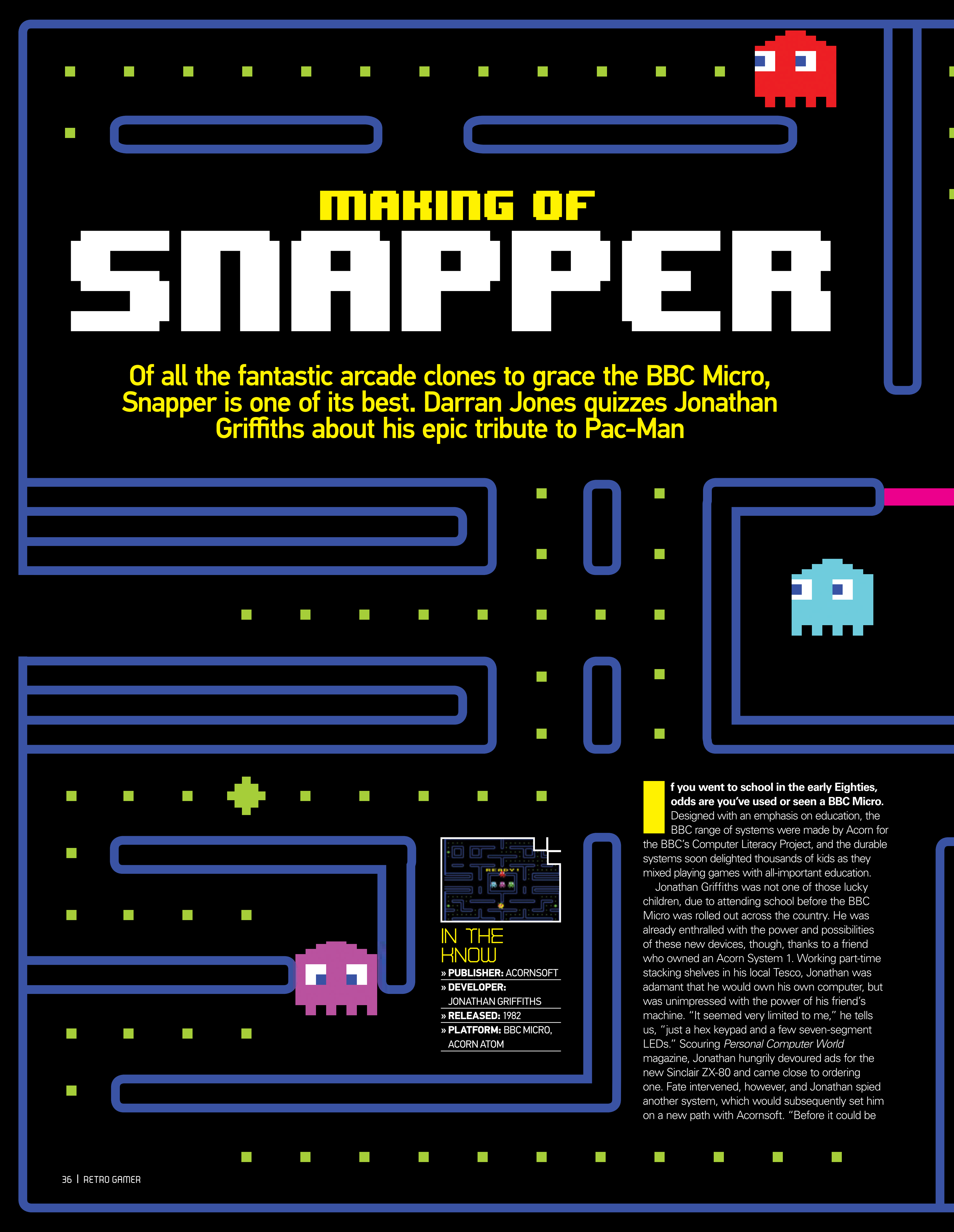




NINJA GAIDEN

TECMO, 1988

■ Ninjas always come across as so cool and powerful, so to see a game debunk this myth so ruthlessly was actually quite amusing. While Ryu can kill most enemies with a single slash or special attack, bats and birds turn out to be the ultimate anti-ninja weapon, forcing our hero down pits for frustrating death after frustrating death.



MAKING OF

SNAPPER

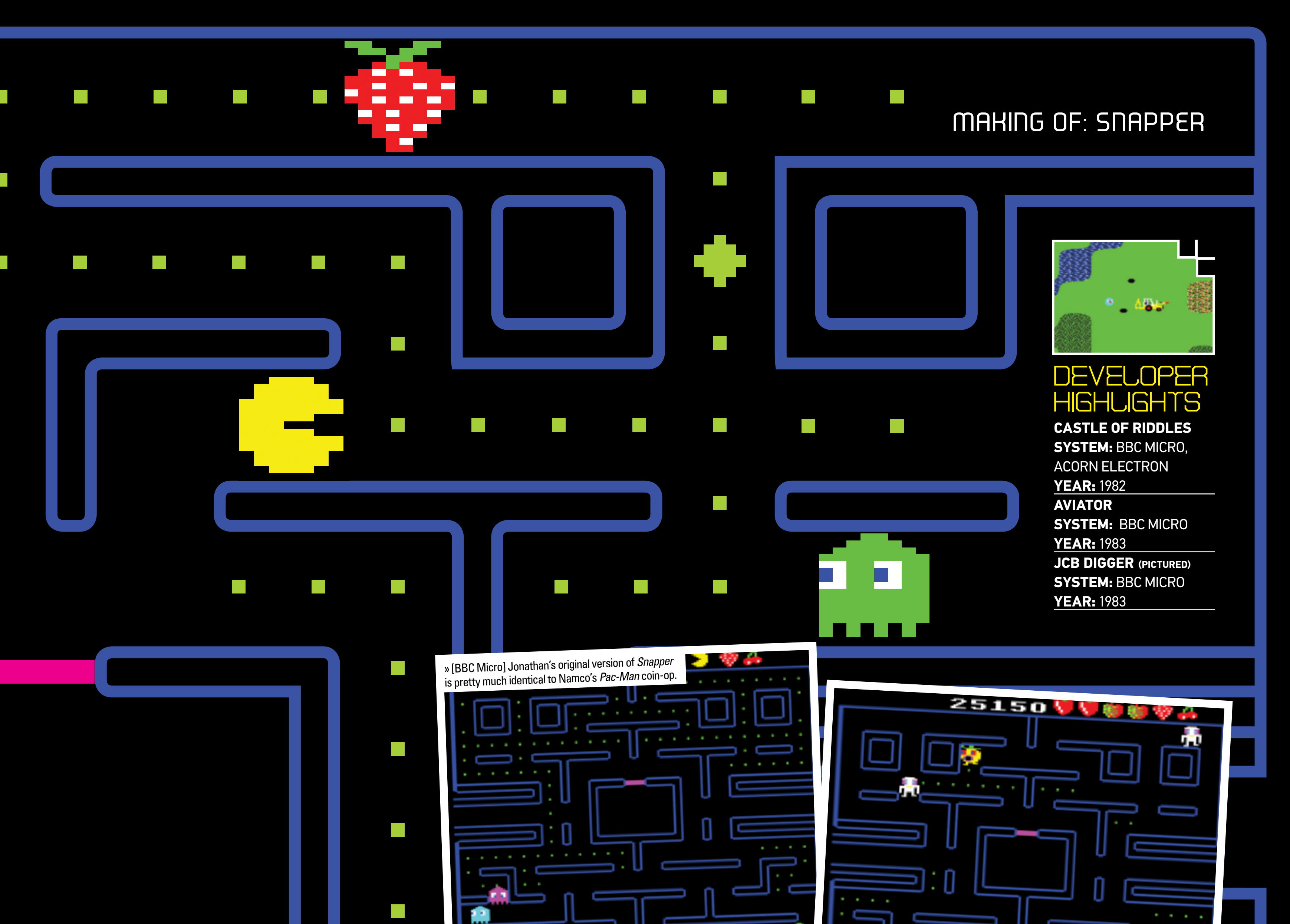
Of all the fantastic arcade clones to grace the BBC Micro, Snapper is one of its best. Darran Jones quizzes Jonathan Griffiths about his epic tribute to Pac-Man

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ACORNSOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** JONATHAN GRIFFITHS
» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PLATFORM:** BBC MICRO, ACORN ATOM

If you went to school in the early Eighties, odds are you've used or seen a BBC Micro. Designed with an emphasis on education, the BBC range of systems were made by Acorn for the BBC's Computer Literacy Project, and the durable systems soon delighted thousands of kids as they mixed playing games with all-important education.

Jonathan Griffiths was not one of those lucky children, due to attending school before the BBC Micro was rolled out across the country. He was already enthralled with the power and possibilities of these new devices, though, thanks to a friend who owned an Acorn System 1. Working part-time stacking shelves in his local Tesco, Jonathan was adamant that he would own his own computer, but was unimpressed with the power of his friend's machine. "It seemed very limited to me," he tells us, "just a hex keypad and a few seven-segment LEDs." Scouring *Personal Computer World* magazine, Jonathan hungrily devoured ads for the new Sinclair ZX-80 and came close to ordering one. Fate intervened, however, and Jonathan spied another system, which would subsequently set him on a new path with Acornsoft. "Before it could be



» [BBC Micro] Jonathan's original version of *Snapper* is pretty much identical to Namco's *Pac-Man* coin-op.

» [BBC Micro] It's a lot easier to eat all four enemies in *Snapper* compared to *Pac-Man*. Use this advantage to boost your points.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CASTLE OF RIDDLES
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO, ACORN ELECTRON
YEAR: 1982

AVIATOR
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1983

JCB DIGGER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1983

delivered, I saw a different ad from Acorn about their new Atom," he recalls. "I cancelled the Sinclair order and bought an Atom as a kit instead. I had no skill with a soldering iron, but a friend offered to assemble it for me, which he did, and off I went."

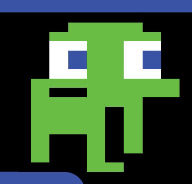
Jonathan continued with his schoolwork, taking Computer Science as an A-level, where he was taught BASIC. It was slow work, however, with Jonathan using a Research Machines 380-Z, which was clunky to use, but a huge step up over the ICL 2900 that he had originally had access to. However, a brief dalliance learning the rudiments of idealised assembly language suddenly made Jonathan pay more attention to the Atom he had sitting at home. "The Acorn Atom had an assembler built-in, thanks to Roger (now Sophie) Wilson, so after quickly mastering BASIC, I, along with a couple of friends, taught myself 6502 Assembler."

Jonathan spent more and more of his spare time coding games for the Atom, but it came at a heavy price. "Somewhat embarrassingly, I failed those same A-levels, not even making the two E grades I was offered by Exeter University, mostly since I spent all my time writing games," he remarks. After taking advice from a friend, Jonathan sent off several of his games to Acornsoft and got lucky. Impressed with what he received, Acornsoft's David Johnson-Davies contacted Jonathan with a job offer, creating games for both the Atom and the BBC Micro, which was still in its prototype stage. Jonathan jumped at the chance and headed to work with David, his secretary Mickey Luff and a handful of other hopeful programmers.

As with other 8-bit coders of the early Eighties, inspiration for many of Jonathan's first games came from a familiar source – the local arcade. "We all played various arcade games at lunch time and in the evenings," he explains. "I was drawn to them since they were so much fun. Growing up near Deal, a seaside town, there was an arcade there and I would spend several hours some days, honing my skill at a new game. I was never the best at any of the games, but I did enjoy them. Much like playing *Candy Crush* these days – you get that same buzz when everything's going right."

Jonathan applied that love of the arcades to his own game creation and decided to make a version of *Pac-Man*, one of his favourite arcade games at the time. He wasn't the only programmer at Acornsoft to do so; Tim Dobson created *Monsters*, an excellent unofficial port of *Space Panic*, while the late Neil Raine produced an incredible homage to *Defender* in the form of *Planetoid*. All three coders were trying to create as authentic a game as possible, utilising the Mode 2 graphics mode which gave access to 160-256 with eight colours. The mode used up 20K of the 32k available RAM and another 3.5K went to the operating system, leaving Jonathan with just 8K to make his game, which was quite the challenge.

Upon comprehending just how much work was needed for the games, the three work friends decided to join forces. "We made a sprite editor first, followed by a multi-file assembler, since the source code wouldn't fit in the available RAM," explains Jonathan. "We used a floppy disk to hold several files, and a single program to load each one in at a time, assemble it into the 8K of object code space and then get the next one. We used a two-pass assembler (to resolve forward references), so each file had to be loaded and assembled twice. It would have been very hard on a tape cassette!" Working as a team to solve several of the programming issues put the three friends in a strong position, which showed in the overall quality of their ports. One such example of Jonathan receiving help from his colleagues was the actual coding of *Snapper*'s maze. In the original arcade game, *Pac-Man* has a vertical orientation but the BBC Micro doesn't, which could have resulted in a very cramped



ACORNSOFT'S ARCADE ASSAULT



PLANETOID 1982

CLONE OF: DEFENDER

■ If we had to pick just one BBC clone over all the others it would probably this astounding effort. Yes it's tricky to play on a keyboard, but the speed, ferocity and sheer panic of the arcade original is effortlessly captured.



SUPER INVADERS 1982

CLONE OF: SPACE INVADERS

■ This is a competent clone of Taito's huge arcade hit. The aliens are there, the UFO is there; even the shields are included. A few liberties have been taken with the alien design, but it doesn't affect the great gameplay.



ROCKET RAID 1982

CLONE OF: SCRAMBLE

■ This is another arcade port by Jonathan Griffiths. It suffers a little due to the now cramped playing area, but it otherwise captures all the elements of Konami's game – including the grating colour schemes!



ARCADIANS 1982

CLONE OF: GALAXIANS

■ This early effort from Nick 'Orlando' Pelling is a solid remake of Namco's hit coin-op with strong vibrant colours and authentic sounding spot effects. Pelling would revisit the arcades again with *FireTrack*, a clone of *Star Force*.



METEORS 1982

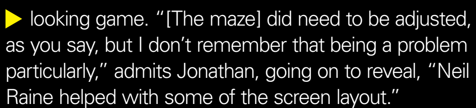
CLONE OF: ASTEROIDS

■ Many BBC owners claim this to be one of the best clones for the system and it's hard not to disagree. Graphically it's excellent, with fast-moving meteors that require you to be always on your toes.

looking game. "[The maze] did need to be adjusted, as you say, but I don't remember that being a problem particularly," admits Jonathan, going on to reveal, "Neil Raine helped with some of the screen layout."

Jonathan may have benefited from working closely with colleagues but he still had plenty of problems to solve with *Snapper*. By far the biggest he encountered was the eating of the actual dots that were scattered throughout the maze and needed to be cleared before *Snapper* could move onto the next round. "Getting the 'dot count' exactly right, every time," groans Jonathan when we ask him about the most difficult task he faced while coding *Snapper*. "If I failed to count a dot that became erased from the screen, then my code wouldn't spot the level being finished, and consign the player to finishing an empty level, which was impossible. The problems were in the corners, where the player's character would sometimes erase a dot before it had been counted. My code used the screen graphics to keep track of things, along with a variable that would always start with the full screen's worth of dots, and then count down as the Snapper ate each one. This took a long time to get right!"

He got it right, though, and the end result is one of the most authentic versions of *Pac-Man* we played.



» [BBC Micro] We don't recall seeing this snappy loading screen on the original Acornsoft version.

Even today, it holds up incredibly well, mainly because it plays so fast and smoothly. There's a tightness and responsiveness to *Snapper* that makes it great fun to play. Jonathan attributes this to working in machine code. [The benefits] were speed and memory efficiency," he tells us. "These were crucial to getting the game working to the standard we'd set ourselves, of getting as close as possible to the original."

We'd argue, though, that one of the main reasons why *Snapper* is so good to play is because it was a game that Jonathan himself loved playing. Like any product, it's a lot easier to create something if you have a connection with it and that was certainly the case with Jonathan. Like many coders in those early days he wasn't necessarily creating *Snapper* because it was simply the next job to do, but because he had a genuine respect and appreciation of the original Namco coin-op. That respect and knowledge can be seen in virtually every aspect of *Snapper*, from the way the Snapper dies, to the flashing of the maze when it's eventually cleared of dots. "[I played *Pac-Man*] enough to understand how it all worked," confirms Jonathan, "even to the extent of spotting that the various ghosts behaved slightly differently to each other, which I tried to put into *Snapper*. I don't know where the name came from, but I do know there was an earlier *Snapper* from Acorn, written by Hugo Tyson for the Atom. I knew of this version before I wrote mine, but I didn't use any of the code or ideas from it when it wrote my *Snapper*.

Indeed, you only have to play Hugo Tyson's interpretation of the popular arcade game to realise that the two *Snappers* are very different beasts. It's, of course, most obvious with the visuals, but even



» Jonathan remains pleased with all the love that *Snapper* continues to receive.

the way the ghosts behave is massively superior in Jonathan's version of the game. One of the key aspects of the original *Pac-Man* was how different the four ghosts behaved. It was nothing more than clever coding, but it ensured that Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde became almost as iconic as the hero they chased. Jonathan's AI coding isn't quite on par with the original game but it's still very, very good. "They would each patrol their own corner, like the original, and break out of their patrol after a time based on the level," confirms Jonathan. "But I hadn't spotted all the nuances of their behaviour, such that one wouldn't follow the player as efficiently as another. Clearly, I didn't play it enough before I wrote my one!"

After around four months of hard coding, *Snapper* was released in 1982 as one of several Acornsoft launch titles. Jonathan's game was extremely well received, garnering solid reviews and good sales. Jonathan's interpretation of *Pac-Man* was a little *too* good, however, and before long Jonathan was told by Acornsoft that he had to change the visual look of *Snapper* so it looked less like *Pac-Man*. Sadly, Jonathan can't remember who was threatening legal action, but he recalls that the changes were because of some

More arcade gold from the popular BBC Micro publisher



MONSTERS 1982
CLONE OF: SPACE PANIC

■ Created alongside *Snapper* and *Planetoid*, this is an excellent adaptation of the obscure *Space Panic*. All the mechanics of the arcade original make it across and it features very authentic-looking visuals, too.



CAROUSEL 1983
CLONE OF: CARNIVAL

■ This is an excellent rendition of Sega's shooter. It's a very accurate port that even manages to throw in the bear bonus round. Its pace might be too sedate for some, but that was also an issue with the original.



CRAZY TRACER 1983
CLONE OF: AMIDAR

■ 'Okay' is perhaps the best way to sum up this effort. The AI of the enemies is very predictable, while the controls feel very stiff, making it hard to change direction. It's finished off by some very ropey collision detection.



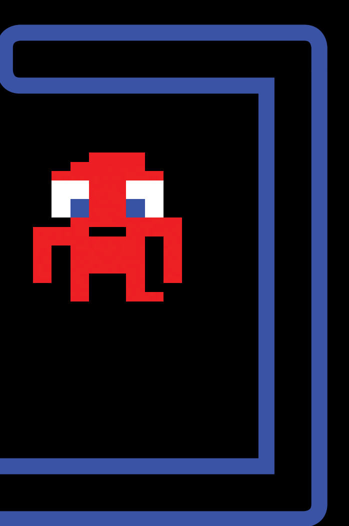
HOPPER 1983
CLONE OF: FROGGER

■ The frog looks a little weird, but this is otherwise another accurate port with all the features of the arcade game and nice, fast-paced action. The timer feels a little tight, but that's our only complaint.



BOUNCER 1984
CLONE OF: Q*BERT

■ The colours can be a little eye-searing, but this is another good arcade clone, this time of the excellent coin-op, *Q*bert*. Keyboard controls are a little tricky, so you're better off using a joystick.



response to his game. He wasn't upset, though. "I realised it might be quite fun inventing my own shapes," he admits. "I like the rotund Snapper with stumpy legs and a green hat! The ghosts changed to humanoids, but they had to keep the large eyes, which are such a feature of the game."

Snapper received a cosmetic overhaul, and a few bug tweaks – although a notable clanger where you could eat ghost eyes to make them respawn as flashing ghosts remained – but it was otherwise the same great game and BBC Micro owners were very happy indeed. It's the same version that was later repackaged by Superior Software after it bought Acornsoft in late 1985, so is perhaps the most well known of the two versions of *Snapper* that existed.

Jonathan admits to taking a great deal of pleasure knowing so many people did and still enjoy his *Pac-Man* clone. "It's rather fun," he admits. "New people occasionally find out that I wrote some ancient games, and are impressed. One manager brought in his copy of Creative Assembler recently for me to sign, after he'd kept it since learning to program on the BBC as a child. Mostly, though, unless you're at least 40, you'd never have heard of my games." ★



MAKE SNAPPER A SNAP

Make playing Jonathan's game a breeze

FRUIT SURPRISE
■ Every stage a different type of fruit will appear that can be munched for additional points. The acorn offers the most points and represents publisher, Acornsoft.

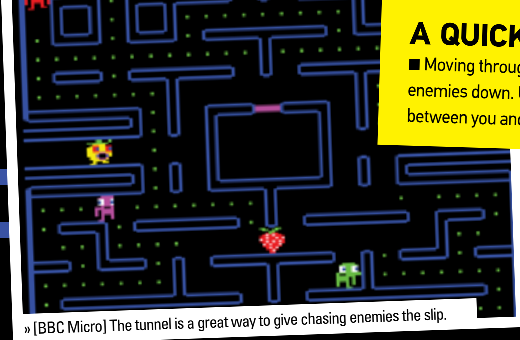
JUST KEEP MUNCHING
■ Unlike the original Pac-Man, munching pellets doesn't slow you down in *Snapper*. Take advantage of this useful fact by homing in on pellets as quickly as possible.

GO FOR THE EYES
■ If you can eat a enemy's eyes before it gets back to the centre of the maze it will respawn and continue to flash. Eat it for additional points.

BEWARE THE GHOSTS
■ The enemies will initially hang around the corners of the maze before they start following you. This time is drastically cut down on later stages.

PLAN AHEAD
■ It's always good to have a back-up plan in *Snapper* so pay close attention to the empty areas of the maze and work those first.

A QUICK ESCAPE
■ Moving through the side tunnels is useful as it slows enemies down. Use this to ensure as much distance is put between you and them as possible.



» [BBC Micro] The tunnel is a great way to give chasing enemies the slip.

Chain Reaction

INSERT OBLIGATORY DIANA ROSS QUOTE HERE

» RETROREVIVAL

» ZX SPECTRUM » DURELL SOFTWARE » 1987

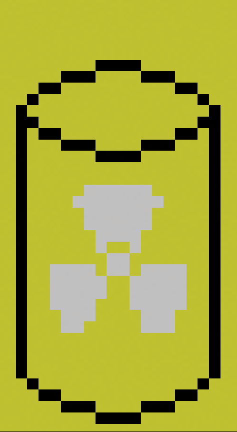
Many of Durell's titles were quite involving, and *Chain Reaction* was no exception.

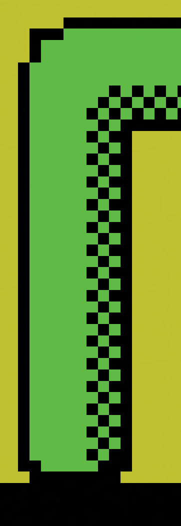
You're required to traverse a seven-story building on the lookout for radioactive fuel pods that you must safely dispose of in a conveniently-placed hole on the first floor. Sadly, it's no easy task as you not only have to deal with a number of vicious robots, but must also battle a tight time limit of 30 minutes.

As a result, you'll find yourself tearing through each floor and screen, tracking down the precious cooling rods while ensuring that you don't receive too much damage from pursuing robots. Every hit causes your radiation level to rise and it can only be lowered by using the decontamination showers found on each stage. Annoyingly, while they restore your precious energy, they also cause you to lose time and it's amazing how quickly those 30 minutes disappear.

It's fortunate, then, that you have a laser gun and jet pack to help you in your task. The jet pack is incredibly handy as you can easily cross the gaps, which start appearing on higher floor levels, while the laser gives you a fighting chance against all the murderous robots that are out to get you.

Chain Reaction is an interesting offering from Durell. It's challenging, engaging and always interesting to play, thanks to its odd and varied screen layouts. Give it a blast and you won't be disappointed. *



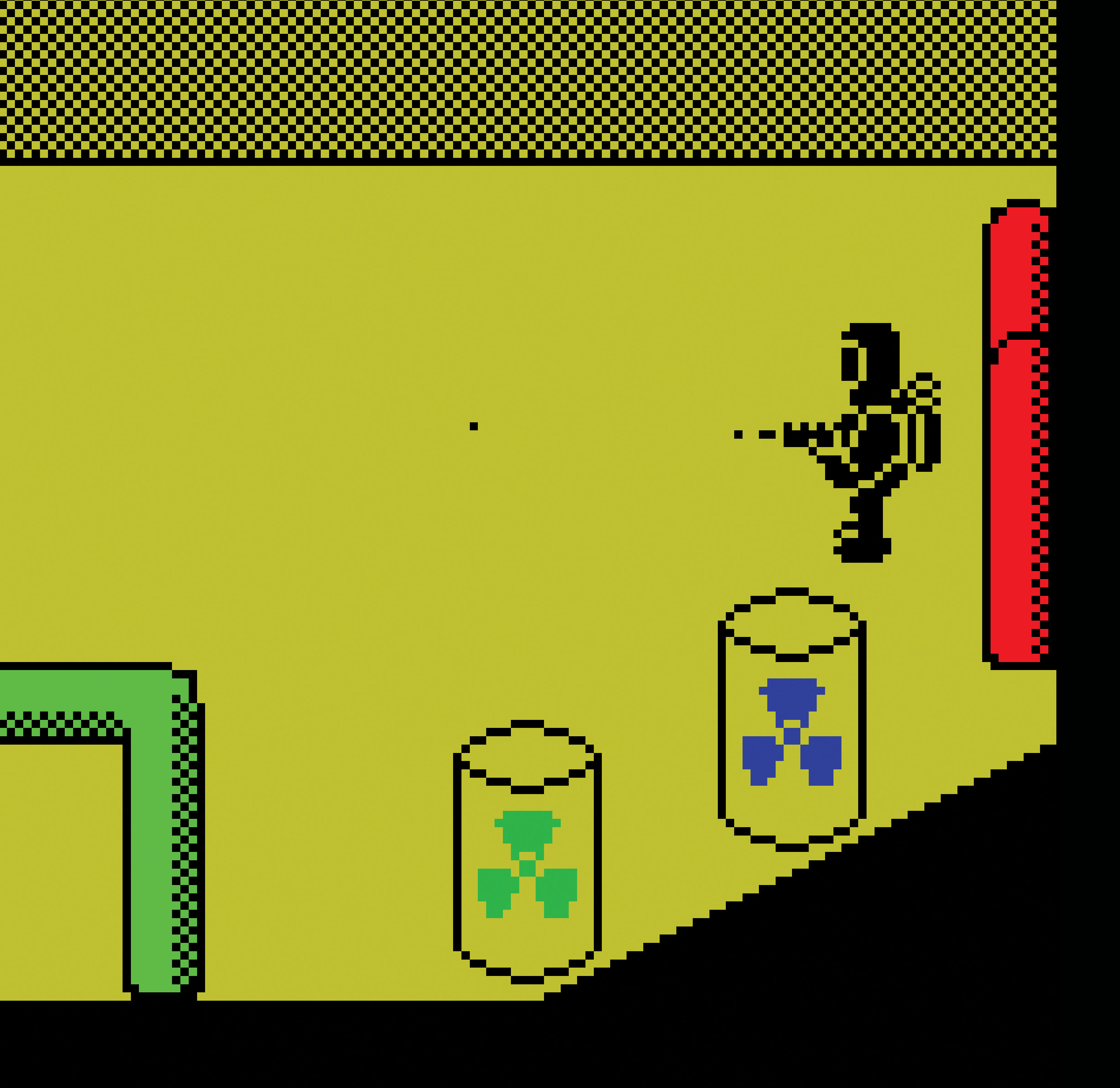


Rad

Jet

Scor

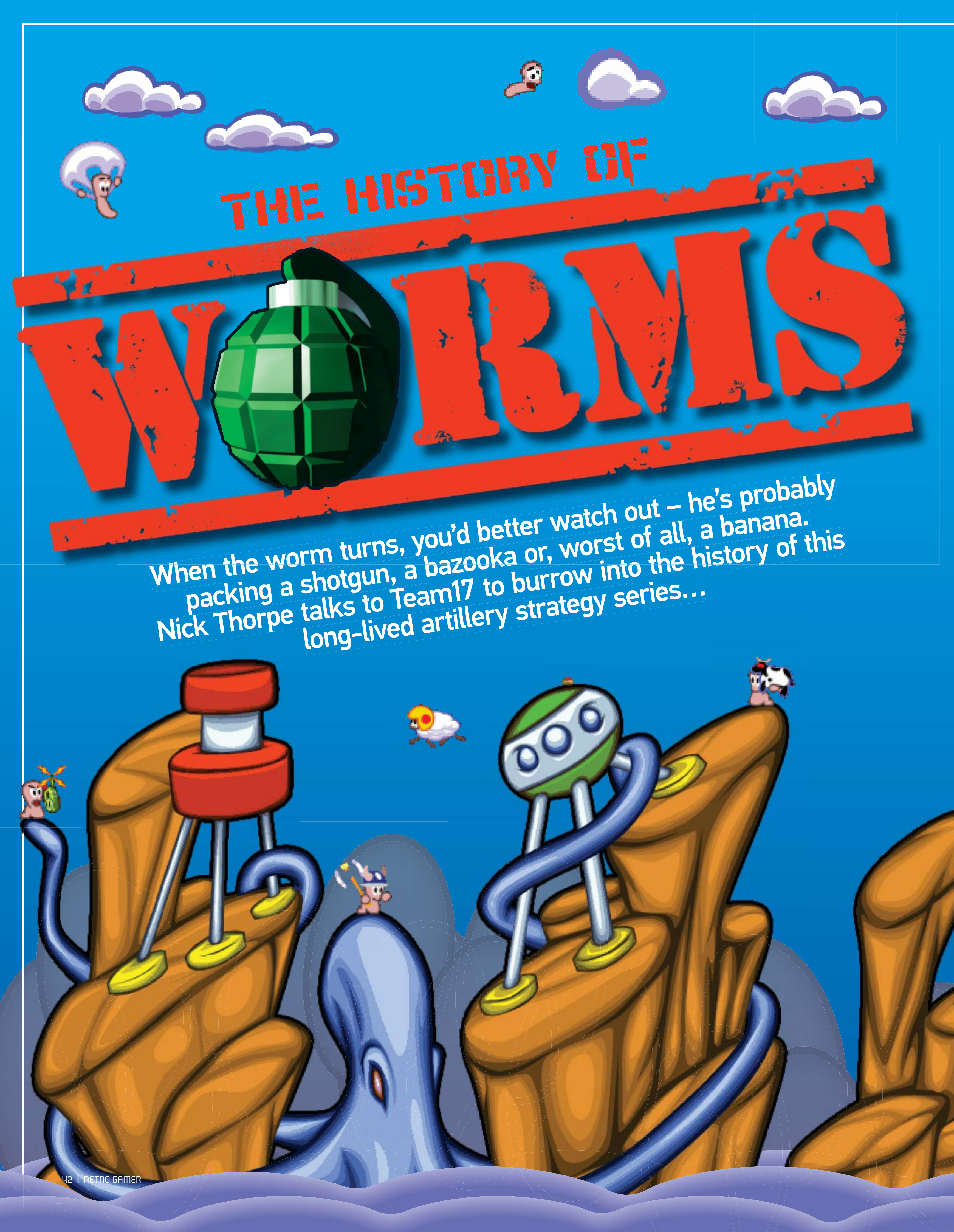
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THE HISTORY OF WORMS

When the worm turns, you'd better watch out – he's probably packing a shotgun, a bazooka or, worst of all, a banana. Nick Thorpe talks to Team17 to burrow into the history of this long-lived artillery strategy series...





Head to page 90 for a fantastic Team17 subs offer

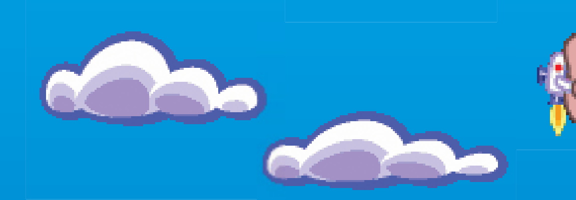
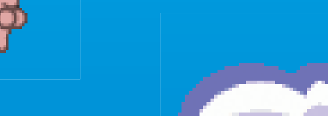
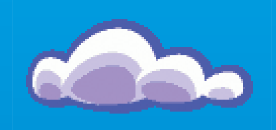
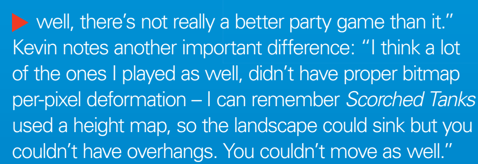
All creatures great and small are eligible to be included in videogames, but some are definitely more obvious choices than others. Domestic things like cats and dogs, cute critters like hedgehogs and even the exotic likes of the bandicoot – those are things that sell. It's bolder to put something front and centre that many people wouldn't want to touch (note that *Spider* never did get a sequel). The fact that *Worms* has become a success over two decades is remarkable, considering how people react to actual annelids.

The story of *Worms*' journey to market is one of tenacity. Andy Davidson had created the artillery game *Total Wormage* as an entry for a game creation contest in *Amiga Format*, but didn't have the success he'd hoped for. Undeterred, he took the game to the European Computer Trade Show in 1994 and impressed Team17's Martyn Brown, who offered the developer help in completing the game and taking it to market. It made a splash, albeit in part because of an aesthetic similarity to another popular Amiga game featuring small sprites, cute voices and lots of explosions.

"When I was a kid I was a huge Amiga fanboy, such an unbelievable Amiga geek," says Kevin Carthew, Team17's creative director. "I was just totally geeked out on Team17 games, because they were the company that was bringing these almost Japanese console, arcade-like experiences to the Amiga. All of my close circle of friends were Amiga nuts – I remember when they got *Worms* for the first time, they were telling me about it at school, and they kept saying, 'It's a bit like *Lemmings*, but it's nothing like *Lemmings*.'" With that description, we had to know if Kevin's circle of friends had come across the Amiga's public domain artillery strategy games before. "Yeah, we had absolutely tons of them – *Scorched Tanks*, *Scorched Earth*, they were the two ones for the Amiga," he replies.

[Amiga] This might look like a vindictive air strike against a single worm. That's because it is.

Given that *Worms* was a full-price, boxed game and most of those efforts could be copied for as little as a pound, *Worms* had to have a distinguishing factor that made the outlay worthwhile. "It just seemed to go that extra yard, I think," offers Grant Towell, lead games designer at Team17. "The weapons, the humour that's inherent to all of the *Worms* games – I think when you put it all together and you get your mates round as

well, there's not really a better party game than it." Kevin notes another important difference: "I think a lot of the ones I played as well, didn't have proper bitmap per-pixel deformation – I can remember *Scorched Tanks* used a height map, so the landscape could sink but you couldn't have overhangs. You couldn't move as well."

With a variety of weapons, funny animations, amusing voices and a platforming element absent from most similar games, *Worms* was definitely the most polished game in its subgenre. The game hit the Amiga market late in 1995, and received near-unanimous praise from the press.

Worms was a success on the Amiga, and that success translated across a wide variety of other platforms as Team17's first ever multi-format release. This is where Grant first encountered the game before joining Team17, as a PlayStation owner. "I found it very hard to start with, it was quite an unforgiving beast," he recalls. "I think it was because everything was so tight with it, everything was so pinpoint accurate," he continues, revealing that he played a lot of matches against the AI which could calculate the trajectory, power and wind adjustment for any bazooka shot with merciless precision. In the end, *Worms* conversions were developed for most contemporary consoles as well as the Mac and PC. The PC even received an expansion pack titled *Worms Reinforcements*, which gave players a single player campaign and the ability to add custom levels and sound packs.

However, the original *Worms* was an Amiga game first, and the debt to the Amiga community was repaid with *Worms: The Director's Cut* in 1997. This revision added improved graphics, a wide variety of new weapons including comedy staples such as the Holy Hand Grenade and oddities like the Sheep-on-a-rope. Levels could now take place in caverns, with ceilings at the top of the screen, and lots of new movement techniques were added for players to master, including various jump types and a more versatile Ninja Rope. It was a great game, but a bittersweet finale – not only was *Worms: The Director's Cut* the last *Worms* game on the Amiga, it was Team17's farewell to the platform upon which it had built its reputation.

"Worms looked nice, but it was so low-res that you couldn't pack a lot of detail in"
Kevin Carthew

[PC] Missions in games like *Worms World Party* use predesigned maps, rather than randomly generated ones.

While Amiga fans may have lamented the move away from their platform, *Worms* was moving on to what is considered by many to be its golden era. *Worms 2* arrived exclusively for the PC at the very end of 1997, and incorporated many of the improvements that *Worms: The Director's Cut* had made to the original game. However, some distinctive features marked this sequel as the start of an all-new generation of *Worms*. As well as teams of up to eight worms, extensive customisation options and the addition of online play, the graphical style was overhauled. The previous game's minimalistic worms gave way to a new breed that was much more cartoonish. Given that *Worms* had succeeded with fairly utilitarian graphics, we were curious as to the reasoning behind the change in approach.

"The artist/animator was a real talent, quite difficult to work with as well, he was incredibly precious but incredibly hard working," Kevin explains. "*Worms* looked nice, but it was so low-res at the time that you couldn't pack a lot of detail into those characters. Danny wanted a high frame-rate – it had to be 60 frames per second – and he wanted a ton of animation frames in there." That's a major task to achieve, but there was a technological aid that helped get the job done. "It was probably one of the first games that used splines," Kevin continues. "They were like little flat polygons, and like 3D animation you could give it some key frames and it could interpolate and work out a lot of extra frames for you. I think there are something like 10,000 hand-tweaked animations just for all of the weapons. If you look at *Worms Armageddon*

or *Worms World Party* now, it's smooth, and that's because of that approach that they took – they couldn't have got that with the old style of character design."

Indeed, *Worms 2* is somewhat forgotten in favour of the aforementioned upgraded takes on the game. *Worms Armageddon* added more substantial single-player missions, more new weapons, and even an additional Sudden Death mode in the form of radiation poisoning. It also got the wide release that its predecessor didn't, appearing on the Dreamcast, PlayStation, N64 and Game Boy Color as well as the PC. It proved to be an excellent version, which is still played and supported to this day.

Following this, the series began a more sustained push towards online multiplayer. *Worms World Party* was an update to *Worms Armageddon* produced primarily to add online multiplayer for the Dreamcast, with additional missions and a new WormPot rules randomiser mode. In *Dreamcast Magazine*, Martin Mathers opined that "Team17 has done everything it can to improve the *Worms* concept without ruining the heart of the game," awarding the game 85%.

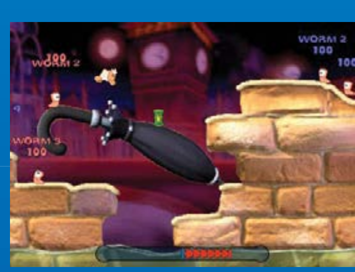
A final 2D title was delivered in the form of *OnlineWorms* in 2001, a localised version targeted at the Asian online gaming market. However, *Worms* was no longer alone in the marketplace, as competitors were springing up elsewhere. At home *Worms* had run up against *Hogs Of War*, and *OnlineWorms* would



» [PC] *Worms: Forts Under Siege* started the trend of costuming that continues in the series today.



» [Xbox] They were less intuitive than the originals, but 3D games like *Worms 4* still offered plenty of fun.



» [PSP] *Worms: Open Warfare* kicked off the third generation of 2D *Worms* with a back-to-basics approach.

» [Xbox 360] The *Worms* series has done big business over download services such as Xbox Live Arcade.

MINISTRY OF OFFENCE

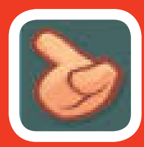
It's said that the best defence is a strong offence, and these armaments are definitely dangerous



BANANA BOMB

DEBUT: *Worms*

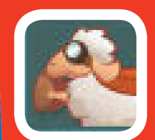
■ Bananas are great for potassium, and this bomb will make you think someone had chucked a solid lump in a lake – it's a potent projectile.



PROD

DEBUT: *Worms*

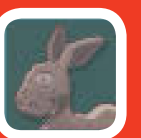
■ If Hulk Hogan can win a championship with a finger poke, you can certainly kill a worm with a prod. This is the go-to humiliation technique.



SUPER SHEEP

DEBUT: *Worms: The Director's Cut*

■ What's better than an exploding sheep? A flying sheep with a cape, that can be controlled for a devastatingly accurate strike. Obviously.



CONCRETE DONKEY

DEBUT: *Worms: The Director's Cut*

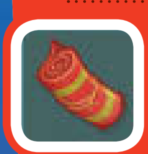
■ It drops and it don't stop, crushing all beneath it. This was inspired by an actual concrete donkey owned by the parents of designer Andy Davidson.



HOLY HAND GRENADE

DEBUT: *Worms: The Director's Cut*

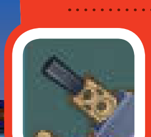
■ Just like it did in *Monty Python*, this will make for a divine intervention in any battle, with a blast radius roughly the width of Slough.



CARPET BOMB

DEBUT: *Worms 2*

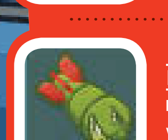
■ What's worse than an air strike? As it turns out, a hail of shagpiles which bounce around explosively after impact is worse.



SENTRY GUN

DEBUT: *Worms 4: Mayhem*

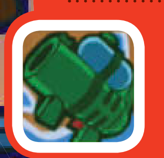
■ This nasty piece of work will fire upon any worm that wanders into its firing range, making it an excellent defensive weapon.



BUNKER BUSTER

DEBUT: *Worms: Open Warfare 2*

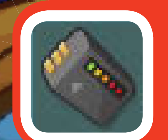
■ We all know a 'darksider' – a defensive player who locates their worms underground. This terrain-smashing bomb will see to them nicely.



WATER PISTOL

DEBUT: *Worms Revolution*

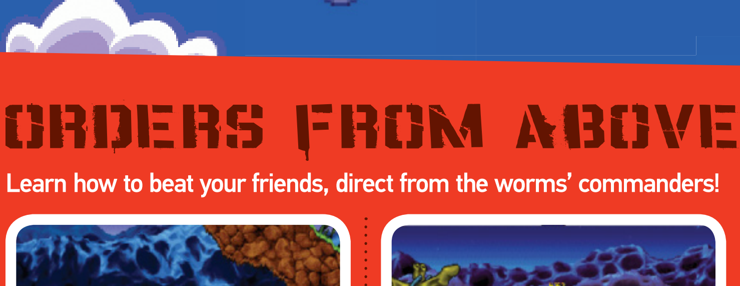
■ Pretend you're Michael Douglas at the end of *Falling Down* with this gun. It's actually useful for both moving worms around and drowning them.




DODGY PHONE BATTERY

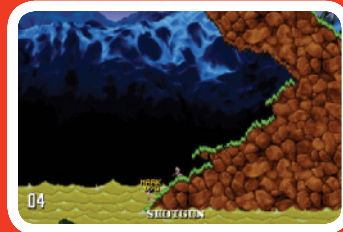
DEBUT: *Worms WMD*

■ This lithium-ion nightmare doesn't just blow up – it sends lightning arcing across any nearby worms and objects for widespread carnage.



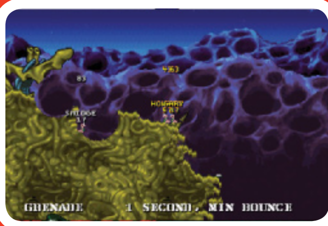
ORDERS FROM ABOVE

Learn how to beat your friends, direct from the worms' commanders!



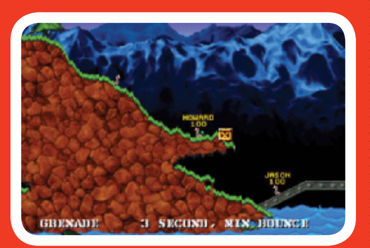
MAKE THE MOST OUT OF THE TIME YOU HAVE

■ You only have a limited amount of time to play each turn, so get accustomed to how much you can do without wasting your time. "Also make use of your retreat time," Grant reminds us.



KEEP YOUR WORMS SPREAD APART

■ "If you've got a worm close to another one, they're doubling up the damage value every time," says Grant. This is exacerbated if they're near oil drums, so spread those worms!



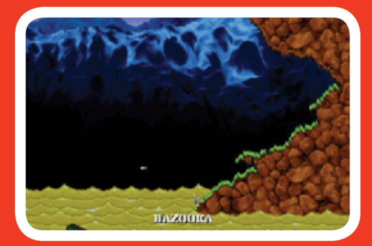
LEARN TO AIM YOUR GRENADES/BAZOOKAS

■ "In almost every scheme that you play, bazookas and grenades are set as infinite weapons," says Kevin. "When your back's against the wall, you know you can rely on using them."



MASTER THE NINJA ROPE

■ The most versatile utility in the game sorts the professionals from the pretenders. "It's just one of those things you can't defend against," says Grant. "If someone's good, they can get across the other side of the map no sweat."



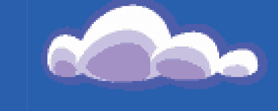
KEEP HIGH GROUND

■ Not only do you potentially have more ground to burrow into, there's also the fact that gravity will draw errant grenades downhill. But the biggest reason to follow this advice? "In anticipation of Sudden Death," says Kevin.



AVOID MAKING ENEMIES

■ If you're playing with more than two players, you can play politics by not inciting anger. "So many times in a *Worms* game, the winner will be the guy who keeps a low profile and flies under the radar," says Kevin.

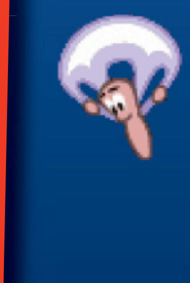


go head-to-head with games like *GunBound*. *Worms* had to evolve with the times, and as great as the second generation of 2D *Worms* games had been, there was no escaping the fact that 3D visuals were becoming the standard that people expected from videogames.

However, going 3D meant fundamental changes for the series, and there was some trepidation about how it could be achieved. "One of the main tactics in 2D *Worms* is tunnelling underground – there were some long, lengthy discussions in the early days about how we'd be able to deal with some of these factors," says Grant. "We added little island pieces that we sort of stitched together. There were certain rules – if you stretched something out using, erm… what were they called?"

"We called them 'poxels' – they were voxels rendered with polygons," Kevin answers. "There were two things. It was a tech solution, how were we going to make this 3D deformable landscape, and can you judge depth in 3D? A lot of the designers were saying it can't happen because you can't judge depth like you can in 2D." In fact, the team didn't believe it until they saw it. "We wrote all sorts of prototypes, and Alaric [Binnie]'s prototype was the first one that showed us you could just about judge depth in 3D, with a bit of practice."

Considering the game designers were sceptical that it could be pulled off, *Worms 3D* received a mixed,







» [PC] Is there anything more annoying than a defensive digging player? No, but that's why Bunker Busters exist.

» [Wii] Nuclear explosions are a common theme in *Worms*, and you can even drop the big one yourself.

but largely positive, critical reception in 2003, with Eurogamer's 8/10 review calling it "an impressive evolution of a much-loved series." *GamesTM* notably dissented from the overall consensus, accusing the game of "surrendering its intuitive interface" in a 4/10 review that proved to be the harshest dished out.

Worms: Forts Under Siege was next up, born from a publishing deal that stipulated one mainline game and one spin-off. It proved to be an unconventional entry that incorporated new elements such as buildings, different tribal storylines and a restriction on where weapons could be fired. Additionally, big changes included a new victory condition of blowing up the enemy's stronghold, and the removal of destructible landscapes. "It wasn't my favourite *Worms*," admits Grant, a sentiment Kevin concurs with. "It was a bit of a B-side, wasn't it?"

The same sentiment couldn't be applied to *Worms 4: Mayhem*, which Kevin was very pleased with. The game introduced the best production values so far, with a fully-fleshed-out story mode featuring cutscenes and boss stages, new weapons like the Inflatable Scouser and the nasty Sentry Gun, and extra customisation for your worms including outfits and team weapons.

"I still think it's a great game now. It was incredibly polished, it kind of felt like the game that *Worms 3D* should have been from the start," Kevin says. "But it wasn't as well received as *Worms 3D*, for some reason. Moving the game into 3D like that makes it harder to play, makes it a more complex game, and even though *Worms 3D* was well received, I think reviewers had made their minds up that they much preferred *Worms* in 2D than 3D when they came to review *Worms 4*."

Part of the problem was that much of the accessibility of the earlier games had been lost in the transition. "The penny dropped for me when I took *Worms 3D* home for the first time, and I put it on and showed it to one of my housemates. She didn't play games, she picked up the pad and was like, 'Right, what do I do?,'" remembers Kevin. "First of all, you need to pick a weapon. 'Okay, how do I do that?' Press the button, open the weapons panel, there's like 40 weapons and she's got no idea what any of them do, so I pick one for her. Then her turn time runs out, she's like, 'What's happened now?' The camera's gone off and is looking at a different worm, she thinks it's her turn but it's not… We take it for granted because we play it day in, day out, but it's actually quite a tricky game to play."

This experience ultimately caused Team17 to re-evaluate how it made *Worms* games, and 3D ended up disappearing (save for *Worms: Ultimate Mayhem*, a later update of *Worms 4*). The result was *Worms: Open Warfare*. The first new 2D *Worms* in five years was ▶

» [PC] Setting up two opposing forts is always fun, but being the victim of pinpoint accuracy with a Bazooka is less so.

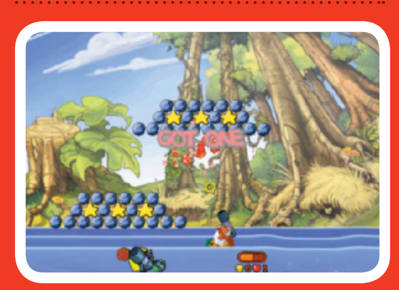
WORM COLONY

Take a look at the other genres the worms have planted their flag on



WORMS PINBALL

■ On the PlayStation, *Worms Pinball* was a straight conversion of the excellent PC game *Addiction Pinball*, with a name change for marketing purposes. The PC version of *Worms Pinball* is just a cut-down version of *Addiction Pinball* without the World Rally Fever table.

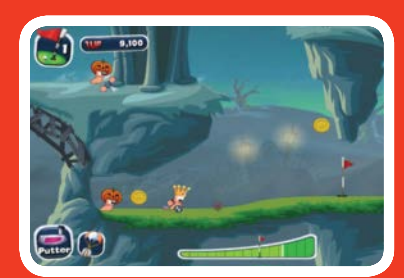


WORMS BLAST

■ Broadening the appeal of *Worms* into the puzzle realm, reminicent of *Puzzle Bobble*, was an interesting idea. It got a mixed reception when released for the PC, PS2 and Gamecube, but it has its fans.

WORMS GOLF

■ You might be wondering how this mobile game works, and we wouldn't blame you. A worm uses a golf club to hit a grenade towards a target – not a hole, but another worm tied to a flag. The hardware limited the game, but the concept was popular…



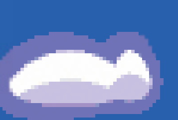
WORMS CRAZY GOLF

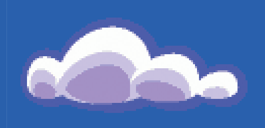
■ Despite being a slightly straighter game of golf than its predecessor, this PC, iOS and PS3 game had plenty in the way of unusual hazards and obstacles, including self-destructing worms and roaming sheep.

THE LOST SPIN-OFF

■ *Worms Battle Rally* was a 3D kart racer in development during the early Noughties. Given the emphasis on weaponry and battle modes in other such games, we can see how it would have worked, but it was ultimately canned.







▶ a break from tradition, being the first game in the series to target handhelds. However it was also a return to the basics, as the weapon set was stripped back to levels unseen since the original game, ousting outlandish fan-favourite weapons like the Concrete Donkey. Still, the return worked critically and provided a new base to rebuild from – *Worms: Open Warfare 2* began to introduce new modes and weapons again, including the fan favourite Rope Race mode and the Buffalo Of Lies.

Additionally, *Worms* was revitalised by a new business model during this period, as the new generation of consoles offered downloadable games. *Worms* and *Worms Armageddon* both proved particularly popular on Xbox Live Arcade, according to Kevin: "I think one is in the top five and the other is literally just outside the top ten, but both were incredibly well-performing games sales-wise on Xbox 360. That and smartphones – the rise of the App Store as a gaming platform means that *Worms* reaches such a huge audience, people that wouldn't necessarily have a gaming PC or buy a console."

Still, not every platform-specific experiment during this generation of *Worms* games worked out quite so well. A case in point is *Worms: A Space Oddity*, a Wii release which introduced awkward motion controls to the series – but ones we learned could have been far worse. "We wanted to do proper motion controls because we'd seen some games do it half and half, or had multiple control options, and we didn't want to do that because the motion controls always play second fiddle," remembers Kevin. "We hadn't anticipated how difficult it would be with the Wii Remote, because the tech in it is pretty simple – there's no 3D positioning, it's all just accelerometers. We got this prototype, and as long as you made a frisbee type motion, it was deadly



» [iOS] Even jolly old Saint Nick gets in on the action during seasonal events in *Worms 3*.



» [PC] In recent years, *Worms* has adopted 3D visuals in 2D games, but *Worms WMD* moves back to full 2D.

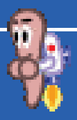
accurate. Then, when we got people to test it, people would do a throw that wasn't what the remote was expecting at all. We had to revert to measuring tilt with the accelerometers." Unsurprisingly, this was dropped for the later Wii release, *Worms: Battle Islands*.

With the series re-established and diversifying across platforms, any new change in design philosophy was bound to be less of a seismic shift, and the fourth generation of 2D *Worms* is notable for its changes to the physics of the game. *Worms Revolution* included new objects that could be moved around and destroyed by worms, and even dynamic water – you could now use weapons such as the Water Pistol to fill up craters and drown enemy worms. The game also included different classes for worms, governing attributes such as speed, strength and special abilities. Also, though 3D visuals returned, the game remained resolutely 2D.

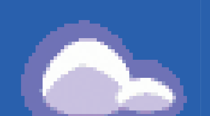
However, the inclusion of a physics simulation was a major change. "The problem with that was that with the feel of the game, everything has to be run through the physics simulation," explains Kevin. The result was that unrealistic things like the old Ninja Rope physics no longer functioned as before. "I was happy with *Worms Revolution* but it didn't ever quite feel like *Worms Armageddon* or *Worms World Party*, and that's what the expectation is." The 2013 PC sequel *Worms: Clan Wars* picked up where *Revolution* left off, developing a new story mode and allowing for greater customisation. *Worms: Battlegrounds* followed on consoles in 2014, and serves as an updated version of that game.

Worms is a series which has become a staple of the videogaming landscape. It has touched virtually every











major gaming platform to have existed during its lifetime, and become a fixture of multiplayer sessions across the globe. It can be easy to take such games for granted, especially if you're the guest playing at parties rather than the one going out and buying the game. However, Boggy B and his arsenal of explosives inspires some love from fans, as one of Grant's memories shows this: "I remember when we were working a Saturday, doing overtime, we heard a bit of commotion outside the front door. We went down and someone had taped a banana to the front door as well as a little sort of sheep! I was like, 'Get them in, they can come and meet everyone,' but they'd literally dropped it on us and then legged it."

"A lot of people are brought to it because of the strength of the character," says Kevin, explaining the series' popularity. "That's what's most iconic about it at first, but I think it's the appeal of the character and as glib as it sounds, the squeaky high-pitched voices – that's what attracts people to it at first. The colour, the humour, the explosions, all that side of it. But what keeps people playing is its initial accessibility combined with its long-term depth of strategy."

Indeed, it's hard to imagine a time when people won't be playing *Worms* – which isn't bad, in a market where cute characters have fallen into obscurity. Now if you'll excuse us we need to grab a blowtorch and slink away, someone's calling in an air strike… *





LAUNCHING A WMD

Team 17 talks about breaking new ground in the new entry in the series



One of the challenges that faces any series is that of innovation. That's the challenge Team17 has faced with *Worms WMD*, which will be out in stores as you read this. While the gameplay and presentation are authentic, with a return to the classic *Worms* physics, what's surprising is that the additions the developer has come up with haven't been used before – they seem like no-brainers.

The first of these is the addition of vehicles. We're baffled by the fact that no *Worms* game has previously let you get in a chopper, and it turns out that the Team17 staff was too. "Vehicles came about at the start of the project, when we were spitballing for new features," explains Adam Findlay, designer on *Worms WMD*. "I think nearly every single person said vehicles!" Each vehicle is very distinctive, too. "With the tank you've got the high damage, with the helicopter you can fly about – it's not as high damage, but it gets you great manoeuvrability." You can kick enemies out of vehicles, but it can come at a price as you'll take extra damage if you're inside a vehicle as it's blown up.

Likewise, being able to walk into buildings sounds like it's something the 2D *Worms* games might have previously covered, yet it's new ground. You can only see the interior of a building that you have a worm inside, which means that you've got a perfect place to not only hide from attack, but set up ambushes. You can even set up a mine or a sentry gun inside a doorway, concealing a nasty surprise for anyone foolish enough to venture into your territory.



The most unusual addition to the game is a crafting system, but it makes more sense when explained in context. "We've been kicking around the idea of what we call 'out-of-turn involvement'," says Kevin Carthew. "When it's not your turn, you're not doing an awful lot. So it's something we've always wanted to do, but never really felt like we'd hit upon the right idea."

You can pick up materials from crates or break down your weapons, and it's worthwhile because as well as being able to make the standard weapons, many items can *only* be obtained via crafting – for example, the Dodgy Phone Battery. However, you'll need to think ahead as dismantling and creating weapons takes time. Also, while having a delivery of any weapon sounds great, that's not quite the deal. "We balanced it out with the ingredients it takes to create weapons, so for the more powerful weapons, you'll need a higher tier of ingredient," notes assistant producer Danny Martin.

The new additions definitely shake up both the single player and multiplayer experiences – time will tell if they help *Worms WMD* to reach the level of fan favourites like *Worms Armageddon*.



CASH $ 30 SCORE





CLASSIC MOMENTS

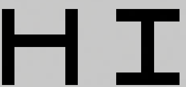
Horace Goes Skiing

» **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** WILLIAM TANG » **RELEASED:** 1982

The useful thing about a blue blob with legs is that he can be virtually anything you want him to be. Horace was the ultimate stand-in – in his first game, *Hungry Horace*, he did a fine *Pac-Man* impression. Later on, in *Horace And The Spiders*, he was an azure *Pitfall Harry*. Even in *Horace Goes Skiing*, at first, he's taking the place of a rather ballsy frog. These were, of course, the days when a lot of Speccy games were 'homages' to other, more successful arcade games, and everyone had to pull their weight.

But all this time spent being an unconvincing doppelganger can get wearying – sometimes you just want to take a break from it all, and that's exactly what Horace does. The special moment of *Horace Goes Skiing* is right there in the title – the game within a game, a ride of escapism down that course, away from that busy, over-familiar road. It's surprising, it's exciting, and just a little bit irreverent. And it opened the gates up to all kinds of kooky possibilities that didn't involve ripping off arcade games. *







MORE CLASSIC HORACE GOES SKIING MOMENTS

Frogging Hell



It should be said that there's nothing wrong with how the game takes on *Frogger*. It's a quick and mean game, with a road packed full of sinister bikes, large trucks and fearsome ambulances – and if you're not careful, you'll be sped off in the back of one of those before you can say 'SPLAT'.

Revenge Of The Larch



What with the forces of Geoff Hamilton conspiring against you in a sinister way, it's likely that our blobby hero will become one with a tree. But all is not lost – there's a small chance that your skis will be alright and you'll be able to race on. It's likelier, however, that you'll have to go back over the road and hire some new ones.

Let's Twist Again



The ski course is full of fun stuff for Horace to do – plenty of jumps to do and trees to avoid. But in the main bit, it's all about the slalom – there's a knack to moving to and fro and getting in between those flags, not to mention a sheer panic when you see that some foul gardener has planted a tree right in the middle of it.

Fear My Immortaliy



Don't worry about Horace – he is, after all, an unkillable blob. The game ends when Horace runs out of the cash needed to fund his out-of-control ambulance ride and skiing habit, at which point he is told, 'NO MONEY NO SKI!'. Horace takes this message on board, at least until you restart the game in three seconds time.

BIO

Little is known about William Tang, but in 1980 he was the first employee of Alfred Milgrom's Beam Software, operating out of Australia – and he brought the blue blob to life through creating some of the Speccy's most successful games. William worked on other games for Beam, including a game creator called H.U.R.G., and a fourth *Horace* game that went unfinished due to William suffering a collapsed lung in 1985. At this point it appears that William left the games industry, never to return.

NEO·

CD-ROM DRIVE
Neo-Geo games always had a lot of data to shift, and this optical drive was the cheapest way to do it. Unfortunately, the single-speed drive wasn't the fastest way to do it.

NEO·GEO CD

SLIMMER BODY
Without the need to accommodate gigantic ROM cartridges, the Neo-Geo CD could afford to be a bit more compact than the Neo-Geo AES.

-GEO CD

The Neo-Geo CD range was a brave attempt to bring arcade-fidelity videogames to the home gamer at an affordable price. Mike Bevan looks at the pros and cons of owning these scarce and collectible systems

TOP-LOADING DRIVE
The initial model of the Neo-Geo CD used a front-loading drive mechanism, but later ones used a cost-reduced top-loading drive instead.

THE ARCADE FEEL
Using the same control ports as the Neo-Geo AES, the Neo-Geo CD was compatible with existing high-quality arcade sticks as well as its own dedicated control pad.

The launch of SNK's Neo-Geo AES console in late 1990 marked a pivotal moment in the history of home gaming systems. For the very first time it was possible to play the exact versions – not just underpowered clones – of arcade titles from the comfort of your living room. With its elegantly progressive marketing slogan, 'The Future Is Now', the Neo-Geo coin-op hardware (the MVS) and its home counterpart hosted some of the most exciting games of the early Nineties, from the *King Of Fighters* and *Samurai Shodown* franchises, to the acclaimed *Metal Slug* series and visually-breathtaking shooters like *Pulstar* and *Blazing Star*. The so-called '24-bit' system certainly lived up to its name – the Neo-Geo moniker being Latin for 'New Ground'. It all added up to the potential stuff of dreams for arcade fans.

The technical specifications of the device were remarkable for its time. Its cutting-edge 2D architecture allowed 380 large, multi-coloured sprites on screen at once, and an advanced palette of 4096 colours out of a possible 65536. The super-fast graphic processing speed benefited from a 68000 CPU coupled with a Zilog Z80 and various custom video chips, and the onboard Yamaha sound processor provided 15-channel sound, with impressive digital speech-synthesis. With their huge cartridges and enormous memory capacities, Neo-Geo games just looked and sounded more impressive than anything on competing home systems, particularly with their massive sprites, vibrant backdrops, animation, and notable dynamic graphical zooming effects. The monolithic black slab of a console dwarfed other gaming systems of the day both in size and capability. But with great power came a very hefty ▶



» [Neo-Geo CD] The rather-rare *Neo Turf Masters* is a surprisingly deep golf game.

» [Neo-Geo CD] Humongous bosses and camels are staples of *Metal Slug 2*

DEFINING GAMES

The blockbuster titles that made the Neo-Geo CD shine



IRONCLAD 1996

■ This exclusive Neo-Geo CD shoot-'em-up was produced by Saurus, creator of the excellent *Shock Troopers* series, and was unfortunately only released in Japan. It is certainly one of the most exciting games of its type on the system, with some exquisite steampunk visuals and nods to classic shoot-'em-ups, such as *Darius* and *R-Type*.

METAL SLUG 1996

■ For some, this is the definitive *Metal Slug* game in terms of action, pacing and epic boss fights, and the Neo-Geo CD version features a unique bonus in Combat School, a remixed survival mode for battle-hardened players to test their run-and-gun skills. With its reasonably short loading times, it's arguably superior to the AES version.



CROSSED SWORDS II 1995

■ A graphically superior sequel to the fantasy Neo-Geo arcade hack-'em-up, this game was designed specifically for the CD-based console. The unusual simulated 3D view through your player's 'ghost' is reminiscent of *Super Punch Out*, while the more RPG-like structure of the game and multiple magical abilities add to its appeal.

NEO DRIFT OUT 1996

■ Another arcade release that made it to the Neo-Geo CD but not to the AES, Visco's racing title is pretty much a top-down take on *Sega Rally*. The sensation of speed and feel of sliding around corners is particularly enjoyable, and there are three familiar cars to drive, namely the Mitsubishi Lancer, Subaru Impreza and Toyota Celica.

PUZZLE BOBBLE 1995

■ Taito's classic puzzle game never actually made it to the AES, despite being distributed internationally for the Neo-Geo arcade system. With its cute bubble blowing dinosaurs and colourful graphics, it's one of those games that remains as appealing to play today as it was when it first appeared, particularly with two players.

» [Neo-Geo CD] This warplane-themed shooter series was renamed *Aero Fighters* outside of Japan.



> "One setback of the system was the fact that the single-speed CD drive was noticeably slow"



» [Neo-Geo CD] One of the last Neo-Geo CD releases, *The Last Blade 2* was a fantastic fighting game – too bad it was hampered by lengthy load times.

▶ price tag. At around £500 for the unit and £150-200 for each cartridge-based game, the Neo-Geo AES was simply way too expensive for the average punter to consider as a viable alternative to the SNES and Mega Drive or home computers such as the Amiga.

In an effort to bring down manufacturing costs and make games more affordable for consumers SNK released a CD-based version of the Neo-Geo, unveiled to the world at the Tokyo Toy Show in June, 1994. When the new console, christened simply the 'Neo-Geo CD', launched shortly afterwards in Japan it sold out of its entire production run of 25,000 units in a single day. North America had to wait until October 1995 to get hold of its version of the unit, although Europeans got it slightly earlier in December 1994. The new console cost $399 in the US, and £399 in the UK, which was admittedly not a massive price drop from the AES. But because compact discs were relatively cheap compared to the cost of ROM chip production, SNK could sell its games for a fraction of the price of the expensive cartridge versions. SNK's new console came with a satisfyingly chunky four-button gamepad, smaller than the arcade-style stick of the AES system, but featuring a unique thumbstick that echoed the analogue controllers of later-generation consoles.

The initial Japanese Neo-Geo CD model was rather bulky and featured a hi-fi-style, front-loading CD tray, which suffered from reported reliability problems. The second model, and by far the easiest to come across nowadays, sported a more traditional top-loading CD tray similar to the Sega Saturn or PlayStation. This was the version produced for the international market. Both systems were able to play audio CDs and there was no region-lock on the system, meaning no restrictions on importing and playing games. However, one setback of the system was the fact that the single-speed CD drive was noticeably slow, causing frustrating loading times, particularly on fighting games, where gamers would be waiting between rounds and every time they switched characters. Even some non-fighting games – the shoot-'em-up *Pulstar*, for instance – suffered from annoying intermissions between levels of up to a minute or so, a definite step backwards from the instant loading times of cartridge-based systems.

For those blessed with a little patience, though, the upside of the Neo-Geo CD was the chance to finally dip into an exclusive quality games library at a much reduced price point. For fighting game fans, the chance



to own arcade-perfect versions of *Fatal Fury, Art Of Fighting* and *Samurai Shodown*, with their stunning sprite-scaling effects, was gaming heaven. The system was also prized for its terrific range of shoot-'em-ups, including *Last Resort, Aero Fighters* and *Viewpoint* as well as sports games like *Baseball Stars, Super Sidekicks* and the brilliant Frisbee-themed *Windjammers*. For software producers, it offered the exciting chance to develop for both the arcade and home market simultaneously, some adding bonus features to the CD versions of their titles. For example, *Metal Slug* and *Metal Slug 2* had a brand-new combat mode not seen in the AES versions, and *Neo Turf Masters* contained a completely new golf course on the CD format. Developers were also able to add enhanced CD-audio, with the likes of *Samurai Shodown II* and its remixed soundtrack which was far superior to the AES and arcade releases.

As undoubtedly great as its software library was, from the mid Nineties, SNK realised that the Neo-Geo CD needed to battle the next generation of consoles from Sega and Sony. While the system was technically streets ahead of the older SNES and Mega Drive consoles as far as running arcade-perfect 2D beat-'em-ups and shooters, it was unequipped to compete with the 3D capabilities of the Saturn and PlayStation, and games like *Tomb Raider* and *WipEout*. The North American branch of SNK wanted to address the problem of loading times, admitting it was one of the most criticised aspects of the system, and feeling it could bring customers back to the Neo-Geo brand. A third iteration of the Neo-Geo CD, the CDZ, directly addressed this technical flaw. Released in 1996 in Japan, the new version of the console was a much more compact design, and featured superior CD caching which significantly improved disc access speeds. Indeed, the CDZ was pretty much essential to play later, more memory intensive games like *The Last Blade, King Of Fighters '99* and *Samurai Shodown IV* due to otherwise unbearably long loading times. Unfortunately, the unit was prone to overheating if left on for ▶

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

We break down the different iterations of the Neo-Geo CD hardware

NEO-GEO CD Front Loader



■ The original Japanese model has front-loading CD tray which was unusual in a games console of its time and more reminiscent of audio CD players.

■ This was the first Neo-Geo CD model to go on sale, and the largest of the three console types.

■ All Neo-Geo CD console models have RCA A/V and S-Video output and two joystick ports compatible with both gamepads and arcade sticks.

NEO-GEO CD Top Loader



■ This was the only Neo-Geo CD console model to be sold outside Japan, and therefore the easiest to find in Europe or North America.

■ Like all Neo-Geo CD models, it has no region lock, making playing imported game titles easy.

■ The design of the top-loading CD drive is similar to the Sega Saturn, and it's probably the most reliable of the three console types.

NEO-GEO CDZ



■ The improved caching of the CD drive of the CDZ models allows for faster loading times, around half that of the older models.

■ The unit is much more compact than the other versions, about two thirds of the size overall.

■ Unfortunately the CDZ is prone to overheating if left switched on for extended periods of over three hours at a time.

NAMED AND SHAMED

The powerhouse console also had its share of chaff…



BURNING FIGHT 1994

■ SNK's reply to the success of Capcom's arcade brawler *Final Fight* was to attempt to pretty much directly copy it, and the result was this uninspiring and very average clone. There's not much point owning it, even if you are a fan of the original – we'd point you in the direction of the much more enjoyable *Sengoku* series instead.

RIDING HERO 1995

■ This owes an obvious debt to Sega's *Super Hang-On* arcade motorbike racer, but graphically it owes more to the much older *Pole Position*, which isn't really a good thing. And, like *Pole Position*, it's very hard to play for more than a few seconds without crashing off the road into a billboard or colliding with other drivers.

AGGRESSORS OF DARK KOMBAT 1994

■ A 'Marmite' fighting game if ever there was one, *Aggressors Of Dark Kombat* has built up a bit of a cult following over the years. But unless you are a hardcore fan of the genre we'd give it a miss due the fact that its grapple orientated system is so hard to time and master against CPU opponents as to make it relentlessly difficult.



THE LAST BLADE 1999

■ One of the most beautiful 2D fighting games ever, but the Neo-Geo CD version of *The Last Blade* was the victim of the cutting of multiple animation frames to reduce loading times. On the older systems you could be waiting around for up to four minutes, although its sequel, *Last Blade 2*, is marginally better in this aspect.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS '99 1999

■ Likewise, this otherwise excellent entry in SNK's premier beat-'em-up saga is rendered highly frustrating by the amount of loading its does between rounds, with frequent pauses to load in the backgrounds and post-match updates. It's not quite as teeth-gnashing on the CDZ, but still not really a good way to experience this title.



» [Neo-Geo CD] *Pulstar* is probably the most technically impressive shoot-'em-up on the system.

> "Despite possible overheating problems the CDZ is the most sought after model, due to its reduced loading times"

long periods of time, due to the reduced ventilation of the smaller casing and the larger amount of heat generated by the new CD drive. This could thankfully be countered by not using it for more than around three hours at a time, and making sure to operate it in a cool, well-ventilated environment. But perhaps for this reason, the CDZ version was never actually released in North America or Europe.

Despite the flaws of the Neo-Geo CD console variants, they remain, like the other Neo-Geo home systems, popular collector items. And, for anyone with an appreciation of arcade history or hand-drawn sprites and animation, they are still one of the best examples of dedicated 2D gaming machines. The European version of the console is subject to a smaller screen and black borders because of operating at 50 MHz, but an imported system from Japan or the US with a step-down AC adapter will get around this. Interestingly, the region setting of the console determines the region setting of games meaning that even the Japanese console can be set-up to play games in English. This works for all but the untranslated titles like *Samurai Shodown RPG*. The 'Front Loader' Japanese and 'Top Loader' international versions are the least expensive to get hold of, give or take shipping costs. Despite the overheating problems the CDZ is the most sought after model, due to its reduced loading times. Because of this, it is around twice as pricey as the two older versions. Expect to pay around £75-100 for the non-CDZ versions and about £200-250 for the CDZ. Be aware, though, that second-hand systems can suffer from the wear of the CD lens and motor, and also the gamepads, usually in relation to the thumbstick controller, depending on how much use they have seen. Because of the rarity of Neo-Geo hardware these problems can be difficult to repair or rectify. All models offer excellent video output, for which an RGB to SCART lead is recommended at around £12.

The attractively-packaged games can be picked up cheaply, with titles exchanging hands from the £15-25 mark for the more common titles such as *Top Hunter, Windjammers* and many of the fighting games. However, prized games like *Metal Slug* and *Twinkle Star Sprites* will be more expensive, and rarities like *Ironclad* will set you back in excess of £150. Compared to the prices of the AES equivalents, though, you won't be looking at £500 for *Ninja Commando* or £1,500 for *Metal Slug*, a rather over-the-top barrier for collectors of these cartridge versions. As such, you can build up a decent Neo-Geo CD library without too much of a hit to the wallet if you hunt around, especially if you are brave enough to rummage about on Japanese auctions sites, where bundles can often be snagged for a few pounds.



» [Neo-Geo CD] The unique competitive shooter *Twinkle Star Sprites* is a wonderful two-player game.

» [Neo-Geo CD] *Viewpoint*, with its stunning *Zaxxon*-like isometric graphics.

» [Neo-Geo CD] *Street Hoop* is one of many accomplished sports games for the Neo-Geo CD.

The final batch of Neo-Geo CD games, including *The Last Blade 2* and *King of Fighters '99*, were released in early 1999 by SNK. As a company, SNK went into liquidation in 2000, and its assets were bought by a Korean company, Playmore. The final SNK-produced game, *Sengoku 3*, was released by the newly-formed SNK Playmore in October 2001, but never made it to the Neo-Geo CD, along with other anticipated titles like *Blazing Star*, *Shock Troopers*, *Garou: Mark of the Wolves* and *Metal Slug 3* (only the first two *Metal Slug* games ever made it to the CD-based system). From this point onwards the reformed SNK Playmore concentrated on limited arcade and home AES publishing as well as supporting other manufacturer's hardware, like Sega's Dreamcast and the PlayStation 2 for games like *The Last Blade 2* and *Metal Slug 3* and *Metal Slug 4*. In total, during its lifetime, the Neo-Geo CD had a total of 98 titles released in Japan by SNK, with 75 released for the international market. However, the machine continued to be supported by homebrew and specialist developers such as the German NG: Dev:Team, which released the shoot-'em-up *Last Hope* for the platform in 2007.

So are the Neo-Geo CD systems worth your time and investment? The answer depends on whether you are enough of a fan of SNK's catalogue of titles and appreciate the knowledge you are playing them on the original hardware. For most non-fighting games on the system loading times aren't much of an issue, and no more noticeable than later CD-based systems. For instance, the shooter *Last Resort* has an initial load of just over 30 seconds after which it never loads again. Earlier fighting games, such as *Samurai Shodown II*, *Fatal Fury 2* and *King Of Fighters '94*, have intermittent loading between rounds but are still quite playable. If you want to play later beat-'em-ups such as *The Last Blade*, *Samurai Shodown 4*, or *King Of Fighters '99*, though, you will probably find yourself rather frustrated, even with a faster CDZ model. The hardware's CD drive is simply not quick enough to deal with the massive data transfer required by these games. One alternative to the CD systems without breaking the bank on a Neo-Geo AES would be a consolised arcade MVS system, which would probably cost around the same as a CDZ model. The MVS cartridges for Neo-Geo games are a fraction of the price of the home AES versions and many decent titles can be picked up from about £15-20 upwards. An alternative way to play some of these great Neo-Geo titles is to pick up ports for consoles like the Sega Saturn, Dreamcast or PlayStation. The PlayStation also has a port of *Metal Slug X*, a remixed version of *Metal Slug 2*. The PS2 has some excellent SNK anthologies including *Samurai Shodown*, *Metal Slug* and *Last Blade*. Perhaps the best place to start would be *SNK Arcade Classics Volume 1*. SNK Playmore also released a number of classic Neo-Geo games for the Virtual Console, including the rare and otherwise hugely expensive *Ironclad*. For many collectors though nothing beats owning an original Neo-Geo system, and as they'll tell you, good things come to those that wait. *



» [Neo-Geo CD] *Last Resort* – a very fine shooter with a look very similar to the *R-Type* games.







PANG

It's Pang, the game with the bouncing balls. Or are they bubbles? They're balloons actually, and with that out of the way, Martyn Carroll can revisit this classic coin-op without further spherical ado...

With a loud pop, *Pang* proved that there were no original ideas left in gaming. Even by 1989, when the game made its arcade debut, it was clear that everything borrowed or built on what had gone before. "It don't half remind you of a lot of other games", wrote *Sinclair User* with some astuteness when it playtested the coin-op in February 1990. The most obvious influence was *Asteroids*, with the balloons – yes, balloons – splitting like space rocks when hit by the heroes' harpoons. One large balloon would burst to produce two medium-sized ones, which would then split again to make four smaller ones, finally resulting in eight tiddlers that would vanish for good once hit. Its other influences were less clear as the game fused shooting, platform and puzzle elements, although the cutesy graphics and single-screen gameplay of *Bomb Jack* and *Bubble Bobble* were likely inspirations.

Yet *Pang* was not just a mishmash of some other games – it had a direct descendant in the form of *Cannon Ball*, a 1983 game from Hudson Soft that appeared on the MSX, Sharp MZ and Spectrum (where it was also known as *Bubble Buster*). *Cannon Ball* featured a little chap splitting spheres with a pointy weapon – just like *Pang*. What a rip, right? Well not quite, as Mitchell Corporation officially did a deal with Hudson Soft to update the concept. And update it Mitchell did, blessing it with stunning new graphics and gameplay features that were more befitting of the era's coin-ops.



» [Arcade] In London, where you could do with a naked American man to come along and steal these balloons.

DYNAMITE

CRAB

BARRIER


BUZZARD
CAKE
BREAKABLE PLATFORM
PIXEL PERFECT
Some of these are helpful, but some are a right Pang in the backside
BALLOON
PLAYER TWO
VULCAN GUN
PLAYER ONE



CODING C64 PANG

Richard Underhill of Arc Developments recalls the challenges of converting Pang to the Commodore 64

HUMMINGBIRD

Did Ocean provide you with any assets to help with your conversion?
Not that I was aware of. At Arc Developments we never actually received any source code for this type of work. Ocean did supply the music and sound effects, along with the code to play them, which sounded great. The only reference I remember was the Amiga version.

Was converting *Pang* to the C64 a smooth and straightforward process?
There were one or two factors that affected development. The first was time. Ocean wanted it quickly and that was probably reflected in our fee! The second was available bandwidth. I was working on a *Galaxy Force* clone called *Restrictor* for Thalamus at the time, which went uncompleted, unfortunately, and this project came along out of the blue. We'd just fired a C64 coder and the only other competent C64 programmer had departed to the Amiga. So we decided I'd write the C64 code. This was, after all, only a platform game with a few balloons…

Did you underestimate the job then?
The major pain I suffered was with the number of balloons bouncing around. Sprite multiplexing was a well-understood area by this time, but there was still a limit to the number of sprites that could occupy a horizontal area without the horrible flashing effect. I decided to use software sprites for the small balloons and since they were all the same pixel definition, and didn't clip, I found I could draw them pretty quickly. Furthermore, the ropes could be drawn in a similar manner – the compromise being that the ropes couldn't have much definition. I also tried to solve the colour-blending problem by using as many single-coloured sprites as possible so they'd stand out. Simpler backgrounds would have offset so many problems, but it wasn't my decision, unfortunately. There was a desire to retain as much detail in the backgrounds as possible to give it a polished look. I was concerned about this, mainly due to the foreground elements blending in and affecting playability, but I was asked to see what would be possible.

Did the cartridge format offer any benefits?
Given the banked memory available, it made sense that discrete chunks of data would be best placed there and backdrops were the obvious thing to try and squeeze in. I started researching data compression algorithms from papers and looking at what the demo scene was achieving, before finally deciding on an algorithm that made sense. The default bank of memory was eventually so crammed that I had to use the system font rather than a custom font. The cartridge development system was very volatile and I recall suffering quite a bit from data corruption. Ocean was keen to produce a disk version of the game after we'd completed the cartridge, but I felt there would be too much loading involved. I was proven wrong some months afterwards when a hacker produced a reasonably playable version.

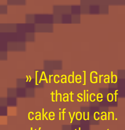
Were you happy with the end result?
Yes I was pretty pleased given the constraints I've mentioned. I'm sure some more time would have been beneficial and I'm of the opinion that we shouldn't have attempted a two-player mode. I know that is fairly basic to the concept of *Pang*, but the C64 is a very limited beast and you have to play to its strengths and offset its weaknesses to get the best out of it. It was a lot of very hard work and I was under a great deal of pressure from different quarters, but it was also quite an enjoyable thing to create. The one thing I'd have wished for would have been a wider audience due to the cartridge format.

> "We never actually received any source code for this type of work"
> Richard Underhill

Co-operative play was the most obvious addition, allowing players to pair up and take on the inflatable menace together. Collectable power-ups were also added, including weapon upgrades (such as a rapid-fire gun) and handy items that would temporarily slow down or even freeze the balloons in mid-air. Platforms and ladders were introduced, too, adding increased variety and challenge to later stages. There were 50 stages in total, split over 17 famous locations that started at Mount Fuji and ended on Easter Island. Why you had to travel around the world on a balloon-popping mission was never explained and was probably just an excuse to add picture postcard backdrops to each stage. Equally odd was the use of *Puff The Magic Dragon* as the theme, in what's surely the most random act of music appropriation since The Beatles' *Lady Madonna* appeared in *Bomb Jack*.

When it came to naming the game there was clearly no consensus. In Japan it debuted as *Pomping World*, while in the US (where it was published by Capcom) it was renamed *Buster Bros*, presumably to draw a parallel with those more famous, mustachioed plumbers. Elsewhere in the world it was simply known as *Pang*. Despite the name changes, the versions themselves were identical with no noticeable differences between regions.

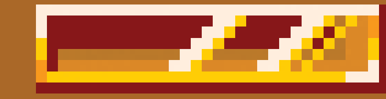
The game was well received when it arrived in Europe. *Computer And Video Games* magazine called it, "A cute and silly little game", which sounds dismissive but the review was positive and the score was 78%. The aforementioned *Sinclair User* scored it similarly, saying that it "Comes out being greater than the sum of its parts."





» [Arcade] Grab that slice of cake if you can. It's worth up to 50,000 points.

HOURGLASS

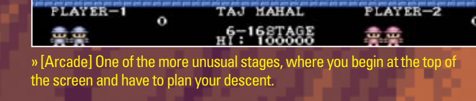


WHELK

» [Arcade] As the end of the game approaches some of the stages become slightly bonkers.

Pang was presented in a standard, upright cabinet and as such wasn't a ubiquitous sight in arcades like the dedicated, showcase cabs from Sega, Namco and the like. The game's exposure increased significantly when it was announced in September 1990 that Ocean Software had grabbed the home computer rights and the 16-bit versions would be out before the end of the year. The original coin-op ran on a Z80 board so Ocean was able to deliver almost arcade perfect versions for the Amiga and ST. The 8-bit releases that arrived the following year didn't translate quite as well – *Pang* is a simple enough game but once the balloons start splitting there's a lot of sprites to move around the screen! However, the release for the Amstrad CPC Plus range coped admirably and received many rave reviews – even the guys at *Mean Machines* were impressed, giving it 93% and calling it, "A brilliant conversion of a fun coin-op that simply demands purchase." Hudson Soft would later reconnect with its original idea by publishing versions for the Game Boy and PC Engine.

Back in the arcade, Mitchell wasted little time in rattling out a follow-up. Titled *Super Pang* in all regions except the US (where it went out as *Super Buster Bros.*), the game appeared just nine months after



» [Arcade] One of the more unusual stages, where you begin at the top of the screen and have to plan your descent.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Which home versions of Pang arrived with a bang?

ZX SPECTRUM

■ It's hardly surprising that Ocean chose not to include any Speccy screenshots on the back of the box. Just look at it, in all its garish glory! Thankfully the game plays much better than it looks, being quick and responsive, and including all of the arcade game features. There's also a nice selection of AY tunes to accompany this 128K-only release.

COMMODORE 64



■ The C64 version was one of Ocean's later cartridge-only releases. The cart format allows for detailed backdrops, but when you add in the coloured character sprites it becomes a bit of mess and can be difficult to see what's going on in some stages. This ramps up the difficulty, which in turn affects the playability, in an otherwise solid and enjoyable conversion.

AMSTRAD CPC



■ This was another cartridge-only release, but on the CPC this meant it could tap into the enhanced Plus hardware. The result is a great-looking, sweet-sounding game that simply wouldn't be possible on the bog-standard CPC (unlike a lot of cartridge titles). It's almost certainly the best Plus game available – and highly sought-after as a result.

ATARI ST



■ Ocean France handled the 16-bit versions and the team did a typically excellent job, producing almost arcade-perfect renditions on machines that suffered from too many poor coin-op ports. The graphics, the sound, the gameplay – everything has been carried across with obvious care and attention to detail, resulting in a first-rate conversion.

AMIGA



■ Developed in tandem with the Atari ST release, this is another perfect conversion. Often compared to its ST stablemate, the backdrops (and balloons) are slightly more detailed and the sound is a little livelier, but there are no major differences. Both versions also have a difficulty select, with the harder modes making the balloons faster and the time limit shorter.

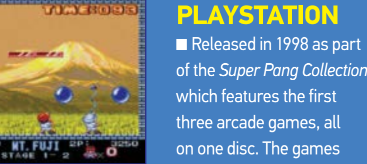
GAME BOY



■ The handheld version suffers from having to cram the action onto the handheld's tiny screen. To make it less frustrating, the level does not restart when you're hit, allowing you to carry on where you left off. The graphics and sound are good, but it's a shame they didn't implement a two-player link-up option as that would have surely extended its appeal.

PC ENGINE





■ Developed in 1993, yet still a fairly straight port of the original coin-op – at least until you get to the end. There are a further four stages, with an extra final location set in space where you have to battle a raging balloon 'boss' to beat the game! Oddly it was released on disc rather than HuCard format, but this did allow it to feature excellent CD-quality audio.

PLAYSTATION



■ Released in 1998 as part of the *Super Pang Collection* which features the first three arcade games, all on one disc. The games are all arcade perfect (or as close as they can be), with the added bonus of CD audio soundtracks. Some more game options besides changing the difficulty level would have been appreciated, but this is still an excellent package.







Pang and was a spruced-up version of the original rather than a proper sequel. The core gameplay was unchanged and it once again featured a world tour mode, only now it was paired with a new 'panic mode' where players faced an almost endless stream of balloons (in similar fashion to marathon mode in *Tetris*). Compared to the original it received just a pair of home ports at the time – a limited release for the NES and a wider release for the SNES.

Despite *Super Pang* effectively exhausting the simple concept, a number of distinct sequels followed over the years. Whereas *Super Pang* ran on the same Z80 hardware as the original game, 1995's *Pang 3* (or *Buster Buddies* in the US) was developed for a 68000-based system and therefore benefited from a performance boost. The final arcade game was the little known *Mighty Pang* which arrived in 2000 and updated the graphics once more but left the gameplay largely untouched.



» [Arcade] One of the stages where the Power Wire weapon upgrade is essential.



In the home, the first three arcade game were bundled together for release on the PlayStation in 1997 (a Saturn version was also advertised but never released). *Super Pang Collection* didn't gain much traction at the time but it has since become a highly-collectable release and you'll need more than a pocketful of ten pence pieces to burst balloons by way of this pack. A decade later, the three games were included as part of Capcom *Puzzle World*, an excellent if erroneously-titled collection for the PSP that also included the brilliant *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*.

Thanks to all the sequels and rereleases, the *Pang* series has hung around like one of those helium birthday balloons that wilt but just seem to keep on going. And further games have continued to breathe new life into the series. *Pang: Magical Michael* was released for the Nintendo DS in 2010, going large with the platforms and ladders element, and in 2016 *Pang Adventures* hit multiple formats, bringing with it new weapons and boss fights. If you count Hudson Soft's *Cannon Ball* as a *Pang* prequel, then the series has remained afloat for more than 30 years and doesn't look like deflating any time soon. *

PANG SEQUELS

You thought that the original balloon invasion was an isolated incident? You were wrong…



SUPER PANG
ARCADE, 1990

■ Rushed into arcades, presumably to counter falling takings from the original, this updated version introduced an endless mode, new balloon types (including extra-large balloons and, yes, hexagonal balloons) and not much else. One useful change was that in co-op mode, the stage did not restart when one player was hit.



PANG 3
ARCADE, 1995

■ The series returned but the brothers didn't, replaced by a vaguely distasteful quartet of characters, each with their own unique weapons (one fires diagonal arrows, for example). The modes from the previous game returned, along with a new ten-stage beginner mode. Exploding bomb balloons were introduced too.



MIGHTY PANG
ARCADE, 2000

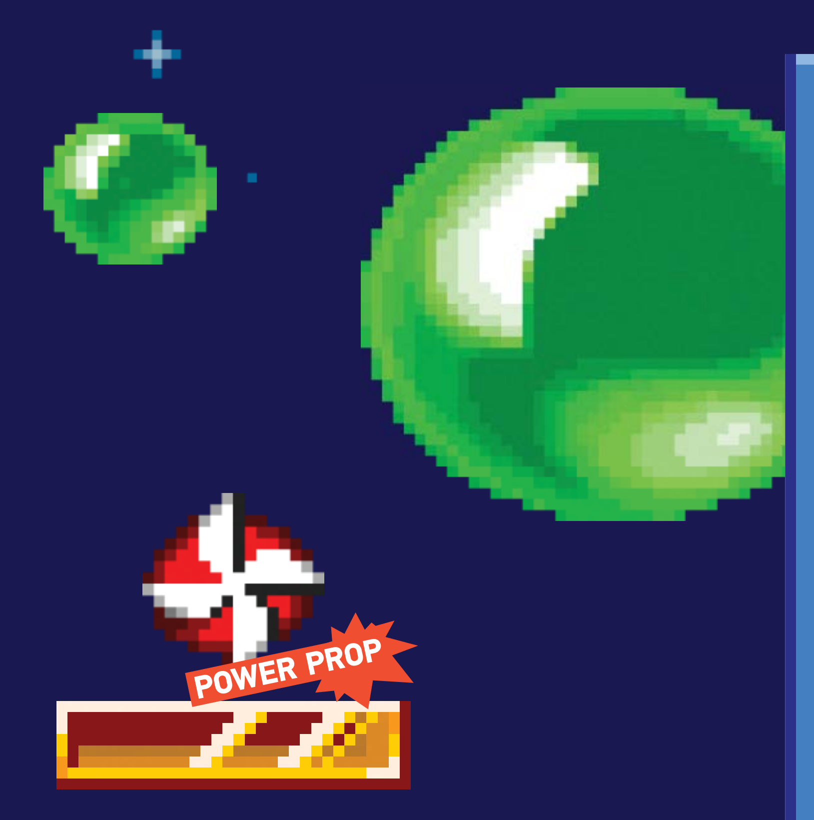
■ The brothers returned – and so did the basic balloon-popping gameplay, although it was now more hectic and taxing than ever. The beginner mode from *Pang 3* was swapped out for an expert mode – this was a game designed for seasoned fans. The new visual style (with moving backdrops) was a welcome addition.



PANG: MAGICAL MICHAEL
NINTENDO DS, 2010

■ This curious title indicates that there's finally a plot: something about a magician messing up an experiment and unleashing balloons which he then has to clean up. The game was loaded with different modes and made good use of the DS's twin screens, and overall deserved to introduce the *Pang* concept to a new set of fans.

CLOCK
STOPS BALLOONS



“The major pain I suffered was with the number of balloons bouncing around”
Richard Underhill



PANG ADVENTURES

PS4/XBOX ONE/PC/MOBILE, 2016

■ The series made a surprising return to modern platforms in its sixth incarnation. As you'd expect there are bells and whistles aplenty (flamethrowers, lava balloons, boss battles and so on), but at its heart lies pure *Pang* fun. Great to pick up and play in quick blasts, with or without a friend – just like the original.

POWER WIRE

PLAYING TIPS

Helpful hints on how to become a top balloon buster



TAKE YOUR TIME

■ Don't be eager to split every balloon straight away. The time limit for each stage is generous, so proceed slowly and work on completely removing one large balloon from play before targeting the others.



GO FOR THE GUN

■ The Vulcan Gun is the best weapon in the game. Grab it and pepper with balloons with shots, removing them before they can hit the ground. Combine this with the clock and you can't fail.



FIRE AND FLEE

■ Standing still and firing is the single biggest mistake you can make. Instead, move in either direction, firing harpoons as you go. The balloons will impact on them and you'll be well away from the fallout.



CRAB A HELPING HAND

■ The critters that appear on the screen will kill you, but they can also aid you. The crab in particularly will destroy the smallest balloons with its pincers, allowing you to concentrate elsewhere.



AVOID THE TNT

■ The dynamite will split all balloons to their smallest size, which sounds great until you find yourself swamped by loads of the little buggers. Use dynamite with discretion, or preferably not at all.



BE PLAYER ONE

■ If both players grab a power-up at exactly the same time it will always be rewarded to player one. On the flipside, if you both get hit at the same time, it's player one who will sacrifice a life.



FIGHT THE POWER

■ The Power Wire is best used on platform-style stages with confined spaces where you can trap smaller balloons. In open spaces you'll often end up defenceless while the wire is anchored.



GET THE GOODIES

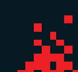
■ As the game progresses the value of the falling food keeps increasing, right up to the slice of cake which is worth 50,000 points. You also earn more points if you collect the food rather than shoot it.

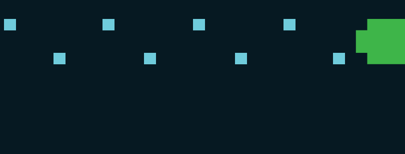
HALLS OF THE THINGS

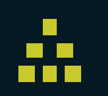
While it may not have the nostalgic charm of Manic Miner or Atic Atac, this 1983 game gripped anyone lucky enough to play it. Gather up your arrows and sword and join Graeme Mason as we take on the nefarious Things…



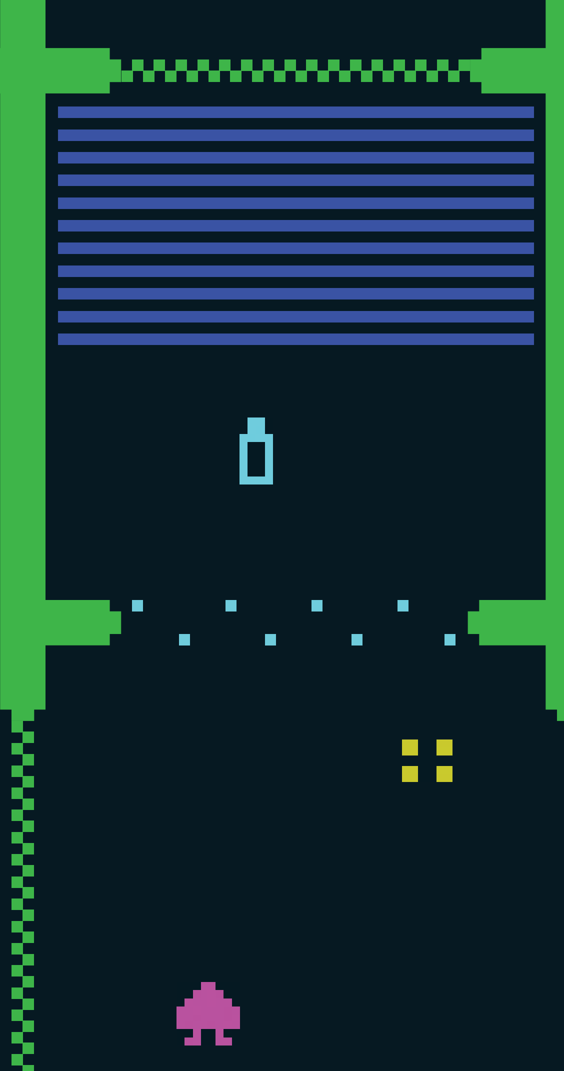




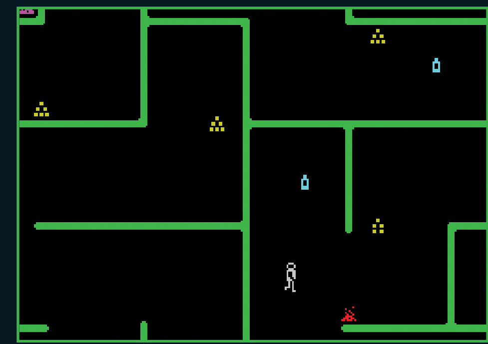




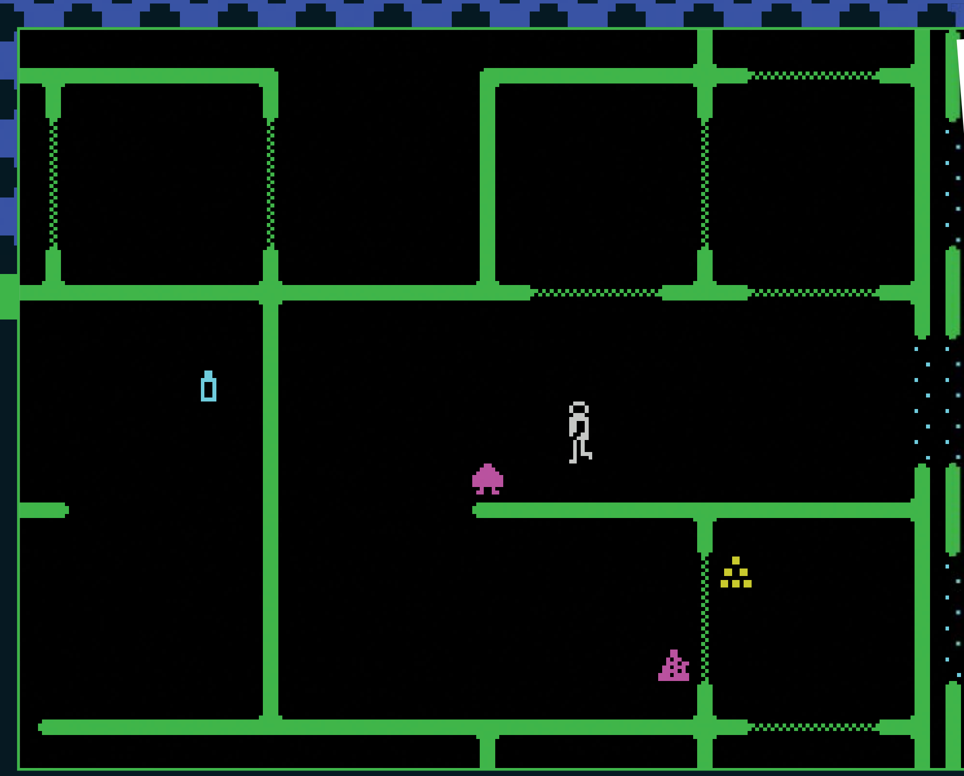




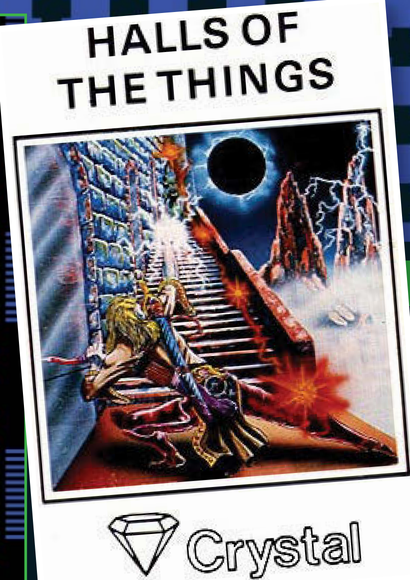
Your correspondent is sitting outside the Wrexham offices of Design Design Technology Ltd., the company started by Simon Brattel in 1976. In keeping with the area's meteorological reputation, it's raining. In fact, that term barely covers the arrows of water that are mercilessly cascading down from the sky. "Bloody hell, it's pissing it down," mutters Simon as he greets us. Blinking, despite the dim light, shaggy-haired and bespectacled, the *Halls Of The Things* coauthor looks every inch the atypical videogame coder. Except he isn't; Simon left games in 1987. A short tour later, and we are sitting in an empty board room, deep within Design Design's offices, the grey-and-white decor disguising the invention and innovation that has taken place since the Seventies. "*Forbidden Planet* was just awful," says Simon glumly of his final videogame, "and I'd had enough. Everything was hard, we'd push the speed up, add things, then it would slow down again.



» [ZX Spectrum] Our hero contemplates moving on, having just blasted a Thing into molten slag with a fireball.



» [ZX Spectrum] At the beginning of each game, the player could choose which level to attempt first.

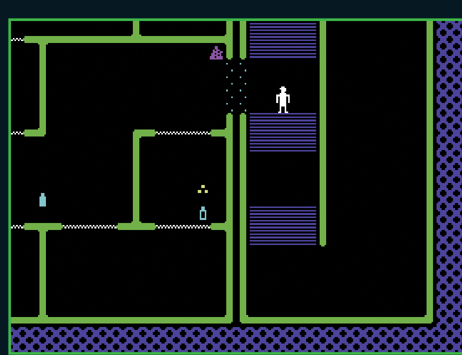


» The original cassette inlay for *Halls Of The Things*.

Horrible." With further denigration of his back catalogue following, we finally get around to the one game he actually seems quite proud of: *Halls Of The Things*.

Initially concerned with just hardware development, Simon's career was diverted in the late Seventies when he bumped into Neil Mottershead at Manchester University. "Neil had a Nascom 2 which at the time was *really* advanced," he grins, "and at that point he was a much better programmer than I. He'd written his own utilities, and we put these onto my hardware and came up with an assembler called Zeus." Another chance encounter, and Simon met Graham Stafford, who would go on to work with Crystal Computing. When Neil and Simon realised they could market Zeus commercially, Crystal seemed an obvious choice. "We were students, just pissing around really," laughs Simon, "and I think at that point we knew Martin [Horsley]. We dimly thought that we didn't like any of the games out there, and were sitting in my flat one night, watching Neil play a BASIC Nascom game called *Keys Of Kraal*. It was an early maze game, and very good for its time. You wandered around using magic, but it was slow. We were thinking, it could be done so much better, and I believe it was Martin who proposed doing one in real time, with more monsters. That's probably where *Halls Of The Things* started."

The storyline and gameplay to *Halls Of The Things* is blissfully uncomplicated. The 'halls' are essentially seven floors of a tower, and one dungeon. The player must search each level for a valuable ring, and scattered around each section are a multitude of treasure, potions and, of course, monsters. "They were supposed to be evil," says Simon, "and we called them Things after a BBC radio series called *Hordes Of The Things*, which



» [C64] Graham Stafford's Commodore 64 version was a direct port of the Spectrum original.

we all loved. One of us suggested *Halls Of The Things*, and no-one could think of anything better. Well, other than *Halls Of The Evil Little Bastards*, but we wouldn't have got away with that…" To defend yourself against the Things, the hero is armed with arrows, fireballs, lightning bolts and a rude-looking sword. "We decided for fairness the enemies should have the same weapons as the player," explains Simon, "although we did give the player the sword, which we didn't bother to give to the Things; that was more a joke for visual effect than anything else." Given using the bladed weapon gave the impression the hero was waving a certain part of his anatomy at the enemies, the joke was not one that was going to be lost on adolescent schoolboys. Simon smiles, "We realised that before adding it – and having thought how amusing it would be, we couldn't possibly have left it out, could we?"





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CRYSTAL COMPUTING
» **DEVELOPER:** SIMON BRATTEL, NEIL MOTTERSHEAD, MARTIN HORSLEY
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

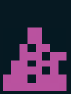


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHAS!
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1983

DARK STAR (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1984

FORBIDDEN PLANET
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986





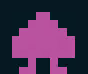
C64 THINGS

Graham Stafford talks about the C64 version of Halls

I loved the game, and was absolutely over the moon when I finally completed it! The different levels, with the number of doors slowly increasing as you got lower down the tower was a great design feature. If I had to pick a fault, it was that it was sometimes too easy to get a really nasty Thing, particularly a treasure monster, too early. We decided to do a Commodore 64 version after I'd completed *Zeus 64* and it was a logical decision as it was [Crystal's] bestselling game at that point. My remit was a straight conversion with the only 'upgrade' from the Spectrum original to add some sound effects. Interestingly, the C64 version was slightly faster – I could annoy Simon by saying that was due to the 6502 processor being quicker than a Z80 or my programming skills being better than his, Neil's and Martin's. But I'd be lying! The C64 version was slightly faster than the original as it had a character screen whereas the Spectrum had a high-res screen, so what was lost in terms of processing power on the C64 was more than made up by much quicker screen access. I really enjoyed doing the conversion, I had the original source code and access to those that had written it – a rare luxury when doing conversions! And it was, in my opinion, the best of the Crystal/Design Design games, certainly in terms of gameplay.


» Graham Stafford coded the C64 version of *Halls Of The Things*.


» Hairy programmer for hire: Simon Brattel circa 1983.



As befitted their student status, Simon, Martin and Neil began coding *Halls* in a anarchic style. Simon explains, "Most of the coding was done with the three of us fighting over the keyboard, and whoever was typing at any given moment had the others looking over their shoulder and suggesting stuff." The early driving force behind the game was that the player should be free to explore whichever floor they desire, and that the mazes should be randomly generated. "To be honest, I don't think it ever occurred to us *not* to randomly generate the mazes," reveals Simon. "The idea of having a fixed maze was very boring to us, and we used to laugh at games that were so limited that they always did the same thing over and over again." The freedom the three students gave to *Halls Of The Things* made it quite possibly the first sandbox game, before the term even existed. "All you had to do was collect the rings and you could play it in many different ways. You could play the levels in order, and don't actually have to use the weapons at all. And although this wouldn't stop the things trying to kill you – they're grumpy – it was possible to finish the game without using weapons."

```
Halls of the Things
MOVEMENT  N:Up        M:Down
          Z:Left      X:Right
   Doors  O:Open      C:Close
OBJECTS   K:Keep      D:Drop
WEAPONS   S:Sword
  Arrows  A:Shoot
          5:Left      8:Right
          7:Up        6:Down
  Spells  F:Fireball  L:Lightning
          H:Heal
VARIOUS   1:Display status
         sp:Centre screen
High Score : Kickaha  100

Press SPACE to continue
```

» [ZX Spectrum] There's no point mapping *Halls* – write down the keys needed instead!

The list of innovative techniques employed by *Halls* goes on; another element that caught players by surprise was how the enemies existed off-screen. "*Halls* was the first game where things that were not shown on the screen fully existed in the game," claims Simon, with certainty. "It was the first game to be a simulation of any kind where you saw a window into a larger world containing 'real' objects, and objects you could interact with. People used to be really surprised when they were shot at by Things they couldn't see." Additionally, *Halls Of The Things* was created on one of Simon Brattel's own development systems. "On my machine we had a much higher resolution display that let us see about four times as much of the maze," he explains. "So the Spectrum version always felt crippled. It was a pain because we had to shrink the rooms down in to fit three vertically on the display, and ended up with 7x7 character rooms, and seven isn't a natural computing number." Despite the limitations, reviews of the time were positive about *Halls*' graphics, mainly because of the absence of attribute clash. "If the Spectrum had been capable of multicolour characters, we'd have used them. But it was as good as it could be…using 8x8 characters avoided attribute clash, and that's so repulsive we never considered not avoiding it."

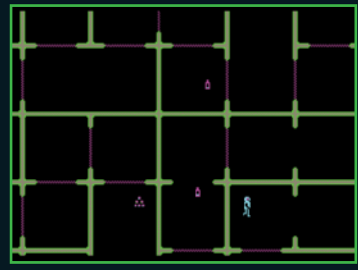
Devoid of any pressure, excited by the project, and blessed with the necessary free time, they worked studiously on *Halls*, totally in sync with both its design and technical requirements, including keeping the gameplay rapid. "We certainly weren't prepared to slow the game down in exchange for prettier sprites," says Simon. "We did try quite a few design variations which never made it to the release version. One such was that for a long time we had an energy bar for the player, so they slowed down if they moved too much and became tired. It forced the player to stop and rest, but we decided we preferred running about frantically."



MORE OF THE THINGS



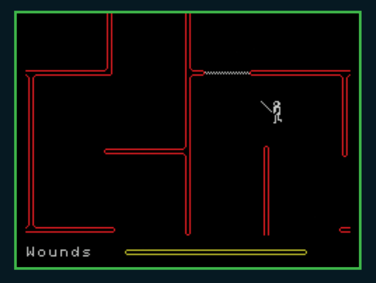
Sequels, remakes and conversions



THE HALLS OF THE THINGS AMSTRAD CPC

1984

■ One year on from the Spectrum version, and the release of the Amstrad computer made a conversion of *Halls* a sensible decision. The improved power meant masked mazes and faster enemies, and it was coded by Simon Brattel, flying solo.



THE WARLOCK OF FIRETOP MOUNTAIN

1984

■ With Penguin keen to commission a computerised version of its hit gamebook, the *Halls* engine seemed a perfect fit, sans magic, and as it transpired, a decent amount of enemies. This was because of Penguin's insistence on a much bigger maze than in *Halls*.



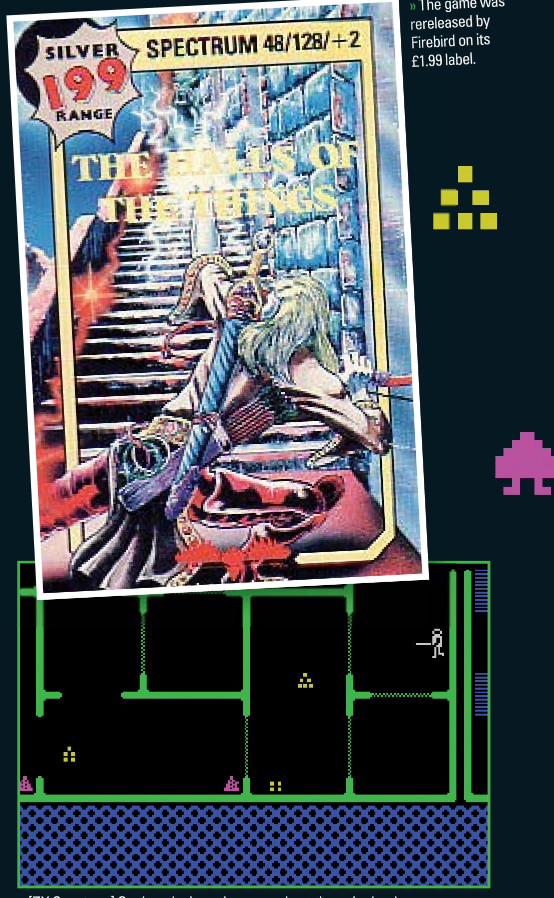
"At one point Neil, Martin and I looked at each other and realised that Halls wasn't just good…it was superb"

Simon Brattel

Upon completion of a playable version of Halls, the team decided to take the game to what it considered an ideal place for testing. "Only the three of us had ever played it," smiles Simon, "and only another couple of people had even seen it, so we weren't sure if it was as good as we thought it was. So we took a Spectrum into one of the common rooms at Manchester Uni halls of residence and set it up on the TV against a background of grumbling from those who wanted to watch television." The effect on the assembled gaggle of students was nothing less than frenzied enthusiasm. "It turned into a huge party, with people fighting to have a turn at the controls. At any one time, there would be six or more people clumped around it, all playing at the same time. One would be on the direction keys, another on 'F' for fireball, and so on, all amid cries such as, 'Go on! Eff it!'" Sometime after dawn, Simon got his overheated Spectrum back, and the team knew what they had on its hands. "At one point in the early hours, Neil, Martin and I looked at each other and realised that *Halls* wasn't just good…it was superb," says Simon. "I remember saying to them then, 'You know, we're never going to do anything better than this, don't you?' And we never did."

Not wishing to be tied to a particular publisher, Simon, Neil and Martin offered *Halls Of The Things* to one of the premier publishers of the time, Quicksilva. "It was an amusing experience," remembers Simon. "We showed them the game at a trade show, and their comment was that they already had a maze game. They showed us something that was just awful, with no style whatsoever. About a year later, after *Halls* was such a success, they rather regretted that decision." Eventually, by default, the game ended up at Crystal. "They had the infrastructure and we were just penniless students," admits Simon, "although they'd probably been the same six months earlier!" *Halls* was a hit, and Crystal's one significant release in its short life. "It sold well, and kept selling too. I think *Dark Star* outsold it in the end, but not by much, and the market was much larger by then."

Yet even that fine *Star Wars*-esque shoot-'em-up is not regarded as superior by its cocreator. So what does endear *Halls Of The Things* to Simon Brattel so much? "Playability. Variation. The range of stress levels and the possibility of sudden death. The sheer bloody-minded aggression of certain things. The subtleties built into the mechanics. Looking back, it's easy to miss how far ahead of everything else *Halls* was and how much other games owe to it. It even had a custom loader, the first game to have one." And much of this is not just because of its creators programming skills, but also the circumstances of the time. "Oh yes," concurs Simon, "the thing with *Halls* is that we were developing it for fun, the three of us writing the game we would like to play; even now I get emails from strangers thanking us for it. I still think it's the best game we ever did." *



» The game was rereleased by Firebird on its £1.99 label.

» [ZX Spectrum] Our hero looks – ahem – moderately excited as he enters this maze…

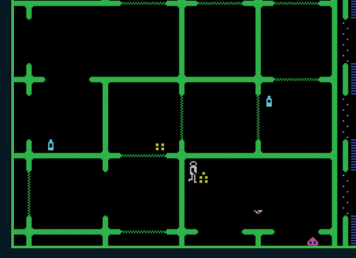




RETURN OF THE THINGS

1984

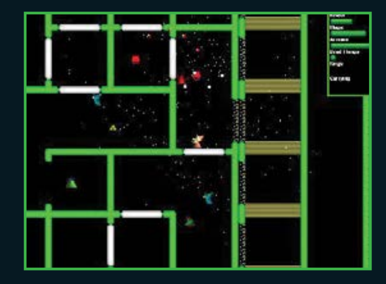
■ Crystal returned to its hit game with this direct sequel that maintained the original's gameplay with a few graphical improvements. This effort was coded by Neil Mottershead virtually on his own, Simon Brattel – who was busy working on space shooter *Dark Star* – only contributed the game's front end.



THE HALLS OF THE THINGS REMIX

1986

■ Available only on the B-side of *Dark Star* sequel *Forbidden Planet*, this improved version of *Halls* included slightly more populated and varied mazes, but otherwise didn't waiver from the game's existing graphics and gameplay. Not a bad bonus for nothing.



HALLS OF THE THINGS – RETROSPEC REMAKE

2003

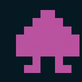
■ This remake by Matt Smith of Retrospec was created many versions of Microsoft Windows ago, so it can be a little tricky on modern computers. It's a like-for-like translation that, while perfectly serviceable, lacks a little of the soul of the original game.



HALLS OF THE THINGS – ZX SPECTRUM

2013

■ Simon coded this version to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the release of the original. It includes sound effects, new controls and a blitz mode that can be played with just a joystick and a fire button. The Things are smarter and worship the magical rings the player needs to acquire…

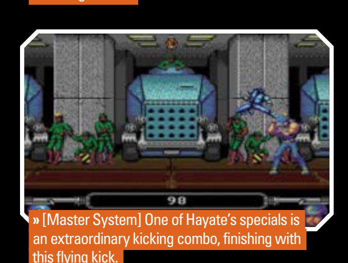


Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

MASTER SYSTEM

Sega's 8-bit system has a low profile internationally, and that means there's lots of hidden treasure to uncover on the console. Our resident Master System collector Nick Thorpe leads the archaeological dig into its archives



» [Master System] Despite the single-button controls, every fighter has a range of attacks, including throws.

» [Master System] One of Hayate's specials is an extraordinary kicking combo, finishing with this flying kick.

» [Master System] As is mandatory in early Nineties fighting games, you break inanimate objects in the bonus stage.

MASTERS OF COMBAT

■ DEVELOPER: **SIMS** ■ YEAR: **1993**

■ Picture the scene: in London, a Sega Europe executive is putting together a list of marketing requirements for 1993. Having noted the growing popularity of one-on-one fighting games, he requests a fighting game for the Mega Drive and the Master System. Cut to an office in Tokyo. "A fighting game? No problem, the Americans are working on that," says one executive, aware of the development of *Eternal Champions*. "But boss," his subordinate replies, "it says here that they want one for the Master System too!" A look of confusion spreads across the executive's face, before he suddenly remembers. "Oh, the old 8-bit console. Haven't they killed that yet? Get SIMS to whip something up for them."

This situation is, of course, entirely fictional, but it's not hard to imagine that something similar was the impetus for the development of *Masters Of Combat*. The plot is the usual throwaway nonsense – a year after a UFO impact, the mayor of Megalo City is holding a tournament to decide the strongest fighter on Earth. You can choose one of four characters to enter the tournament. There's the speedy ninja Hayate, the oddball technologically-assisted fighter Wingberger, military-heavy High Volt Man or the burly grappler Gonzalez, each of whom have their own special moves and attributes. It's a limited roster, bulked out by a typical vehicle-smashing bonus game and the final boss, the alien inhabiting the mayor.

However, *Masters Of Combat* is interesting because it's a technical showcase for the Master System and in many ways, it's an unusual and progressive fighting game. The game sports some fine visuals, with detailed single-screen backgrounds that have their own animation, plus character sprites that are small, but well animated and largely free from flickering and break-up. The game also features some neat presentation between rounds, with story scenes and a city map to help pace the action.

The key attraction is the fighting, and it's here that the game shines. One button handles all your attacks, with special moves involving unusual sequences of diagonal inputs. There are some surprising additions here –

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

EVIL ZONE

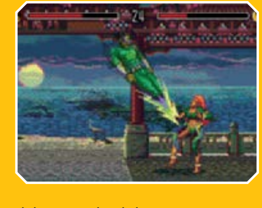
PLAYSTATION



■ Much like *Masters Of Combat*, *Evil Zone* gives you a single attack button to play with, and fits all of its moves around that single button. It's not counted amongst the premier PlayStation fighting games, but it features a unique anime-style presentation that sets it apart from its rivals.

ETERNAL CHAMPIONS

MEGA DRIVE



■ Sega tried to put its own stamp on the fighting genre with this high-profile title, and did some interesting things – limited-use special moves and attacks that utilised the stage backdrops were uncommon in fighting games, and remain so. It's soul-crushingly hard in single-player mode, though.

FIGHTERS DESTINY

N64



■ This fighter breaks the mould by dispensing with best-of-three matches. It's not about whether you down your opponent – it's about how you do it. A time-out victory is worth only a single point, whereas a throw will earn you two and a knockdown is worth three. Get to seven and you win.

double projectiles, canned combos and even moves with deliberate downsides (such as Wingberger's bazooka, which knocks him over). The other button governs movement when used in conjunction with the D-pad, allowing for forward and backward dashes, ground slides and wall jumps.

Masters Of Combat is limited by its roster, and it's also an expensive rarity today – expect to pay over £100 for a copy in good condition. However, it's a great example of a era when experimentation was common in game design, and some of its features definitely make it feel like it was ahead of its time. Plus, on a system that isn't blessed with a wealth of fighting games, even a strong but unorthodox example of the genre is welcome.

IN DEPTH

SCOPE IT OUT

■ Wingberger's an odd fighter, who uses neat cybernetic enhancements to gain the upper hand – just check out the telescopic leg he's kicking the other Wingberger with here.

FRONT ROW

■ These background spectators and exhaust valves are animated, giving the stage a vibrant appearance that is rather unusual amongst Master System games.

RING RULES

■ Much like in other fighting games, *Masters Of Combat* matches take place over the best of three timed rounds. In the event of a time-out, the fighter with more health wins the bout.

MIRROR MATCH

■ With only four characters, the range of match-ups available in *Masters Of Combat* is small. Luckily, mirror matches are permitted – and they're mandatory in single-player mode.

Minority Report

POWER STRIKE

■ PUBLISHER: **COMPILE/SEGA** ■ YEAR: **1988**

■ Compile had a knack for putting out excellent shoot-'em-ups in the Eighties and early Nineties, and this conversion of the MSX2 hit *Aleste* ranks amongst them. It's a fairly straightforward shoot-'em-up, but it's designed very well – the enemies you face will depend on which of the game's eight special weapons you have access to. These weapons include multi-directional shots, swinging lasers and homing shots, and can be powered up further by collecting more icons of the same number. Your main shot can also be powered-up by collecting the 'P' icons which are dropped throughout the game.

Power Strike is definitely a challenge. The enemies are relentless, the levels are long and you'll face multi-segmented bosses that need to be taken down piece by piece. However, it's one worth enduring as the game looks great and packs a huge amount of action on the screen, but manages to minimise the sprite flickering and break-up that can cause a huge problem in shoot-'em-ups on 8-bit consoles. As a result, it's one of the best examples of the genre on the Master System.

The reason *Power Strike* is so often overlooked is that Sega didn't seem to have a whole lot of faith in the game. The European release is uncommon and thus mildly expensive, typically coming in at the £15+ mark, and the North American market didn't even get a retail release. Instead, the game was available by mail order only and sported a cheap-looking blue and white cover. If you can find it, this release will fetch in excess of £100 – but if that seems tempting, you should probably just hunt down a copy of the equally expensive and totally brilliant *Power Strike II*.



» [Master System] Each of these circular sections on the boss is a target that must be destroyed.

» [Master System] Backdrops are relatively varied for an 8-bit shoot-'em-up, transitioning from jungles to plains.

» [Master System] *Power Strike* shifts an impressive number of sprites without causing any major graphical errors.

More Games To Play



» DOUBLE HAWK

■ DEVELOPER: **SANRITSU / OPERA HOUSE**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ Here's a PAL exclusive which shamelessly borrows its game design from *Cabal*. The UN has hand-picked two soldiers to combat a terrorist threat, and it's so confident in their skills that it hasn't even bothered giving them body armour. It's a simplistic game, but the two-player co-operative action is a lot of fun. It's not as good as *Cabal*, though – the lack of a dodge roll move definitely makes it less fun to play.



» KUNG FU KID

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ This beat-'em-up is the sequel to the obscure SG-1000 title *Dragon Wang*, and takes more than a little inspiration from the likes of *Kung Fu Master*. Instead of beating up thugs, though, you're smacking supernatural foes from Eastern mythology – hopping kyonshi zombies, the phantom twins Rinrin and Minmin, and even a floating witch. Additionally, unlike Irem's arcade hit, it has some light platforming elements.



» BUGGY RUN

■ DEVELOPER: **SIMS**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ If you liked *RC Pro-Am* on the NES, you'll likely get on with *Buggy Run* because the two games are very similar in design. Your goal in this isometric racer is to make it through a series of four-car races, aided by power-ups such as nitro boosts and mines, which you can buy alongside car upgrades with your winnings. There's also a *Micro Machines*-esque multiplayer mode. The only off-putting factor is the steep price it commands.



» COMICAL MACHINE GUN JOE

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ This early card release is a Japan-only oddity. You're faced with hostile gangsters that pop out from all over the single-screen levels, and your goal is to shoot them down before taking out a powerful boss. Odd distractions include a spider that deflects your shots and a pig that can be shot to release a bomb. This can be used to destroy all enemies on screen, but also blows you up if held for too long.

MEGUMI RESCUE

■ DEVELOPER: **AICOM** ■ YEAR: **1988**

■ The Master System had quite a few peripherals, but the Paddle Controller never made it out of Japan. For the most part, that's no big deal – *BMX Trial: Alex Kidd, Galactic Protector* and *Woody Pop* aren't a huge loss. However, the oddball trampoline-jumping firefighting game *Megumi Rescue* is a hidden treasure, and a conversion of an arcade game that never saw a full release.

Using the paddle, your goal is to propel a fireman into the air with a trampoline, directing him towards the windows of tall buildings to rescue various people (and cats). When you reach the window you desire, hit the button to grab on and hit it again to let go, releasing any items and grabbing any survivors. This is complicated by the fire, which spreads from window to window as you play – if it reaches a survivor, they'll jump and hope that you catch them. To prevent this, you can grab windows that are on fire to extinguish them. A level ends when you've either cleared the building of survivors or extinguished all the fires.

Megumi Rescue is a bright, colourful game with a slightly dark undertone, and one of the few truly essential import games for the Master System. The Paddle Controller is expensive now, but schematics exist so you can make your own.

» [Master System] Megumi Rescue is an attractive game, featuring colourful visuals and cute sprites.

» [Master System] Grab a survivor to bring them down to earth – just make sure the trampoline's there to meet them.

> **"Megumi Rescue is a bright, colourful game with a slightly dark undertone, and one of the few truly essential import games for the Master System"**

RETRO STINKER

» CHAMPIONSHIP HOCKEY

■ DEVELOPER: **US GOLD** ■ YEAR: **1995**

■ Why has nobody heard of this conversion of the brilliant *EA Hockey* for the Master System? Probably because it's an insult to the game it was based on, although the spring 1995 release date helped.



» MIRACLE WARRIORS

■ DEVELOPER: **KOGADO / SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1987**

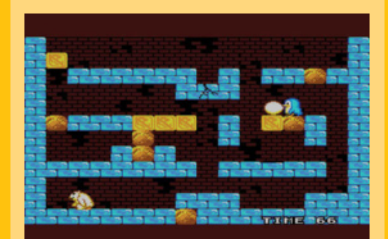
■ This Japanese RPG appeared on the NEC PC-88 computer, and the Master System version was the only official English translation. It gives you a fair bit of freedom – you can wander where you like, and gain or lose reputation. As always with 8-bit JRPGs, there's a lot of grinding involved in making progress, but if you don't mind that it's a good buy, as it's a bit cheaper than alternatives like *Phantasy Star* or *Ys*.



» RESCUE MISSION

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1988**

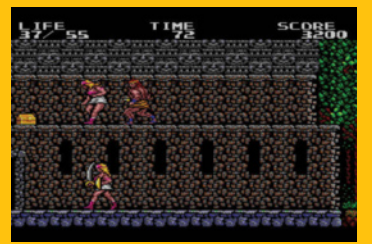
■ This top-down Light Phaser title is one of the more inventive gun games out there. Your job is to protect a military medic on a handcar, as he carries out a dangerous mission to treat injured soldiers caught behind enemy lines. This involves gunning down enemy soldiers, blowing up mines on the rail tracks, and even occasionally shooting bullets out of the air if things get a bit too hairy! The only downside is that it's pretty short.



» PENGUIN LAND

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ Precious penguin eggs have been lost on a far-off planet! As Commander Overbite, your job is to escort the fragile omelette container safely back to your spaceship. This tough puzzle platformer requires a fair bit of forward thinking, as you plot a path past the biggest hazards. If you get bored of the existing challenging stages, there's a level editor and battery back-up to ensure that the game lasts for absolutely ages.



» DANAN: THE JUNGLE FIGHTER

■ DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ This side-scrolling platform RPG is often overlooked, despite being pretty good – it plays much like a cross between *Rastan* and *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*. There are plenty of hidden items and areas to find across the game's stages, and the visuals show off the Master System's colour palette well. It's not a common find in the wild, but it's worth a look if you get the opportunity to play it.



Established by the Darling family 30 years ago, Codemasters' rapid rise as one of the UK's foremost gaming developers has been dizzying. David Crookes looks back over the key moments that put the publisher into top gear



» [ZX Spectrum] Codemasters budget games varied in quality from excellent to poor. *Miami Chase* wasn't one of its better games.

"We created brand identity, brand differentiation & brand engagement all very quickly"
Bruce Everiss

Richard and David Darling used to be everywhere: on television, the radio, in magazines and newspapers. They were young, ambitious and talented and as the faces of a new company operating in an exciting new industry, the media couldn't get enough of them.

With the help of their father, James, they had become the well-educated teenage directors of the games publisher and developer, Codemasters. But in promoting their games, operations director Bruce Everiss had a very clear plan. He encouraged the pair to accept scores of interviews, making them the face of the company they had set up.

"People identify with other people, not with products," Bruce says. "So we created brand identity, brand differentiation and brand engagement all very quickly, very efficiently and very cheaply using the brothers." It wasn't long before the lads were being dubbed 'whiz-kids' and yet, in interviews, it became clear that they were very much adults.

The brothers had grown close by the time they set up Codemasters in 1986. Although they were chalk and cheese in many respects – David, the elder by a year, proving to be the impulsive one while Richard was more considered – the pairing worked well. David was able to use his personality to get things done while Richard was able to rein his brother back if he got too carried away.



» [Amstrad CPC] *Grand Prix Simulator* was an early game created by the Oliver twins and one of Codemasters' many simulators.

Together, they had grown to love coding. At school in Vancouver, they had been taught to program using punch cards, and a friendly janitor also allowed them access to the computer room outside of hours. They used their father's Commodore PET at the weekends, creating a text version of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Meanwhile, school friend Michael Heibert, whose family had a VIC-20, joined them in their endeavours. The trio set up Darbert Computers and they made clones of games such as *Galaxian* and *Defender*.

Sent back to England to continue their education, the brothers bought a VIC-20 of their own, and they later created another company, called Galactic Software, with the help of Michael, who was still across the Atlantic. They placed a £70, half-page advert in the magazine *Popular Computing Weekly* which resulted in scores of orders being placed. Their efforts brought them to the attention of newly-formed publisher Mastertronic and the brothers' careers began to take off.

Quitting their education and creating a host of budget-priced games including *Space Walk*, *BMX Racers*, *Jungle Story*, *Orbitron*, *Sub Hunt* and *Pigs In Space*, the brothers' reputation grew. Helped by a self-written tool called The Games Creator which ended up being released commercially, Richard and David had made £200,000 between them by the time they were 16 and 17. In 1985 they also held a 50 per cent share in Mastertronic and yet they wanted to go at it alone.

The brothers sold their shares in Mastertronic in March 1986 and by October they had set up Codemasters with the help of their father. While ▶

INSTANT EXPERT

■ Richard and David had a nomadic childhood, living in Holland, Australia, Canada, France and the UK due to father James' work.

■ **When they set up Galactic Software, the brothers initially duplicated and distributed the cassettes themselves.**

■ The Darlings wrote or sourced 70 per cent of Mastertronic's software and prompted them to go it alone with Codemasters in 1986.

■ **Richard wrote games for Codemasters but David preferred management.**

■ The Oliver twins wrote *Dizzy* at the same time as working on *Pro Ski Simulator*, much to the Darling brothers' surprise.

■ **David wore a T-shirt saying, "I told you so" when *Dizzy* didn't take off…**

■ …he presumably stopped wearing it when *Dizzy* became a hit months later.

■ **Codemasters fleetingly considered making its own console. Someone the Darlings knew came up with some graphics chips but the company decided against it.**

■ Former *Crash* editor Richard Eddy quit the mag to become Codemasters' PR.

■ **A NES version of *Treasure Island Dizzy* was showcased at CES in 1990 to test the market.**

■ The Aladdin Deck Enhancer, made in the US by Camerica, bypassed the NES' lockout 10NES chip.

■ **Codemasters was awarded nearly £10m for loss of earnings following four years of court wrangling over the Game Genie.**

■ Codemasters was a loyal developer to the original PlayStation.

■ **In 2000, Codemasters was the UK's second fastest-growing company.**

■ Codemasters is primarily a racing game studio today.



elder sister Abigail did administrative work and managed the front desk in a small, windowless unit at the Beaumont Business Centre on a light industrial park in Banbury, James dealt with the business end and David and Richard were involved in creating new games.

The brothers shared one of the three rooms and James took another, all working among copious amounts of packing boxes and assorted clutter. Richard had been writing the racer, *BMX Simulator*, a follow-up to *BMX Racers* which he coded at Mastertronic. It was an instantly recognisable title which the Darlings were convinced would sell. "Budget games would allow us to grow because it gave us a larger audience and people would start to collect them," David says.

The remit, as the hits stacked up, was that the budget games had to be of full-price quality. "The process of development was the same for us because we didn't care about the price of the game – if it was a skiing game then we wanted to make the best skiing game and if it was a rally game, then the same applied," says David. "But if Ocean did a game like *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* then they'd have to pay for that license and they'd have to advertise and pay for that, so a lot of their money got used up in marketing."

In order to make money with such tight margins, though, Codemasters needed a lot of games. Knowing that they couldn't knock out so many themselves – not without a severe drop in quality – the Darlings looked to attract others on a freelance basis which not only avoided tying people into the company, but allowed them to test the wider talent base.

G-Man and *Danger Zone* were coded by Mike Clark, *Terra Cognita* was programmed by Stephen Curtis and *Super Robin Hood* was produced by the combined talents of Philip and Andrew Oliver, aka the Oliver twins, who met the Darlings at a trade show in Hammersmith. Peter Williamson coded *Super Stuntman* which was based on a concept by David, and Mark Baldock took Codemasters' soon-to-be-famed simulators down a popular, yet pointless, path when he wrote one based on fruit machines. The Oliver twins sprung up again with *Ghost Hunters*, while Gavin Raeburn created *Lazer Force* and Timothy R. Miller coded *ATV Simulator*. "Simulators appeared to sell ten times better," David said.

The number and quality of games at this time meant Codemasters was well on its way to becoming one of the UK's top publishers, and yet it wanted more and more talent. In mid-April 1987, Codemasters placed an advert in *Popular Computing Weekly* that not only flagged up its five number ones, but listed the conversions that it needed to be completed.

It was certainly an eye-opener. The publisher wanted *Grand Prix Simulator* ported from the Amstrad CPC to



» [Amstrad CPC] *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* was a massive graphical improvement over the earlier *Dizzy* games.

» [Amstrad CPC] *SAS Combat Simulator* was kind of like *Commando* and not like a combat simulator.

DEFINING GAMES
Games which were Absolutely Brilliant



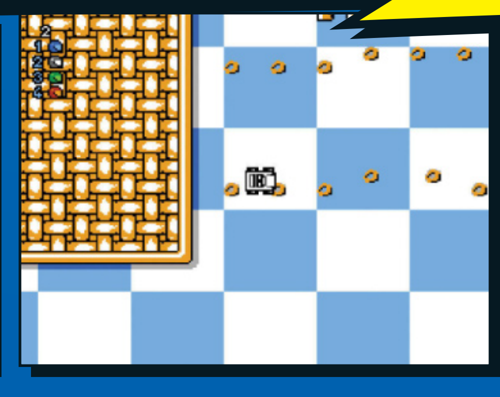
BMX SIMULATOR 1986
VARIOUS

■ Codemasters rode into life on the back of its first simulator, a game that indulged the Darlings' passion for BMXing and provided an instantly-recognisable title. Written by Richard Darling who had created *BMX Racers* for Mastertronic and retailing for £1.99, the player controlled tiny bikes around seven top-down viewed tracks strewn with old tyres, puddles and ramps, completing three laps within a time limit. It was one of many simulators created by Codemasters ranging from *Grand Prix Simulator*, *ATV Simulator* and *Pinball Simulator* to *Professional Ski Simulator*, *International Rugby Simulator* and *Super Tank Simulator*. They largely stopped when rival companies such as Alternative Software got in on the act.



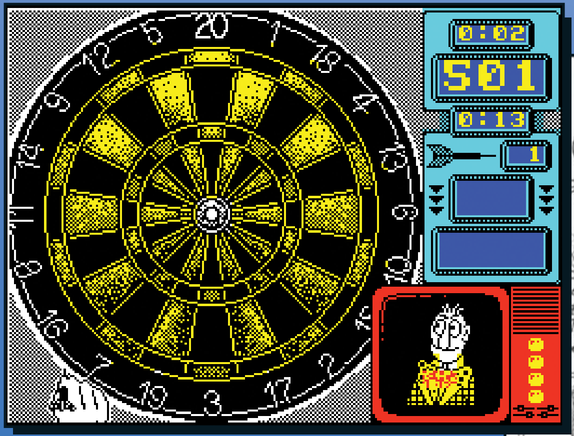
DIZZY 1987
COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM

■ Dubbed 'Mr Easy-to-draw' by Codemasters, there was a great reluctance to release Philip and Andrew Oliver's game since it was a major departure from the other titles being made at the time. But the original puzzle-based adventure game became a sleeper hit, charting after six months and then refusing to budge. Demand and love for the original *Dizzy* led to a sequel, *Treasure Island Dizzy*, but then the floodgates opened. As well as a further seven games, there were also various spin-offs including *Fast Food*, *Kwik Snax* and *Bubble Dizzy*, not to mention specials produced for various magazines. An unreleased game, *Wonderland Dizzy*, was unearthed by the Olivers in 2015.



MICRO MACHINES 1991
VARIOUS

■ At the first Consumer Electronics Show, Codemasters had made a failed attempt to talk to Nintendo about creating licensed games and decided instead that it would find ways of doing it alone. Plug-through cartridges and the Aladdin Deck Enhancer, which bypassed the NES's security chip, provided solutions and allowed games such as Andrew Graham's wacky racer to be played. *Micro Machines* was breathtakingly fresh with multiple players controlling tiny vehicles, not only across pool tables and gardens but around eggs and waffles too. The sequel was also hugely innovative, not least for the multiplayer capabilities brought about by the Mega Drive's J-Cart – another innovation from Codemasters.



» [ZX Spectrum] Games such as *Wacky Darts* showed the merits of budget games – this could never have worked at full price.

» "I was working for Big Red Software and we were touting for business," says Fred Williams. "We sent this round to see if anyone wanted to fund our game."

> **"I used the boys' fame to ensure our products had exactly the right presence"**
> Bruce Everiss

the Spectrum, for instance, and it was willing to pay £3,000 for the trouble. It also needed *Transmuter* on the Atari and it was offering a willing coder £2,500. Codemasters promised that the successful completion of a conversion would lead to guaranteed work and so the number of young up-and-coming developers approaching the company for commissions boomed.

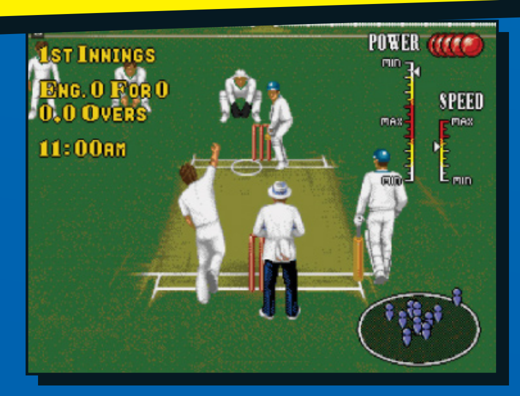
"We were striving to create the highest quality we could because we were programmers who loved games, so from a creative point of view, we wanted to create fantastic games," says David. It also helped enormously that Codemasters – and the Darlings – had become recognised across the industry.

In this respect, Bruce was doing a fantastic job. He had been in computing for eight years, first as the managing director of a computer store in Liverpool and then as operations director at Imagine Software. Shortly after Codemasters was set up, Bruce had decided to give the Darlings a call and invite himself down for an interview, offering to take on the responsibility for marketing. He was duly hired and one of his shrewdest moves was approaching the London PR company, Lynne Franks who got the young men on every children's weekend TV programme and in every newspaper colour supplement, often as the cover story.

"They were constantly recognised on the street, celebrities almost," Bruce says. "Once the boys were all over the national press, it made life incredibly easy with the specialist press, who I then had eating out of my hand. For instance there were three Sinclair magazines, each with a circulation of more than 100,000. I used the boys' fame to ensure our products had exactly the right presence in them all.

Yet the Darlings would soon have some internal competition as the face of Codemasters. In 1987, the Oliver twins had unveiled a new egg-shaped character which they called *Dizzy,* and they had placed it in an adventure that offered the same kind of puzzle-solving gameplay as age-old text-based equivalents. The Darlings weren't pleased but, with the game written, they agreed to publish it anyway.

They felt justified in their reluctance when the game failed to shift in large numbers. But then they ▶



BRIAN LARA CRICKET 1996

MEGA DRIVE, WINDOWS, AMIGA

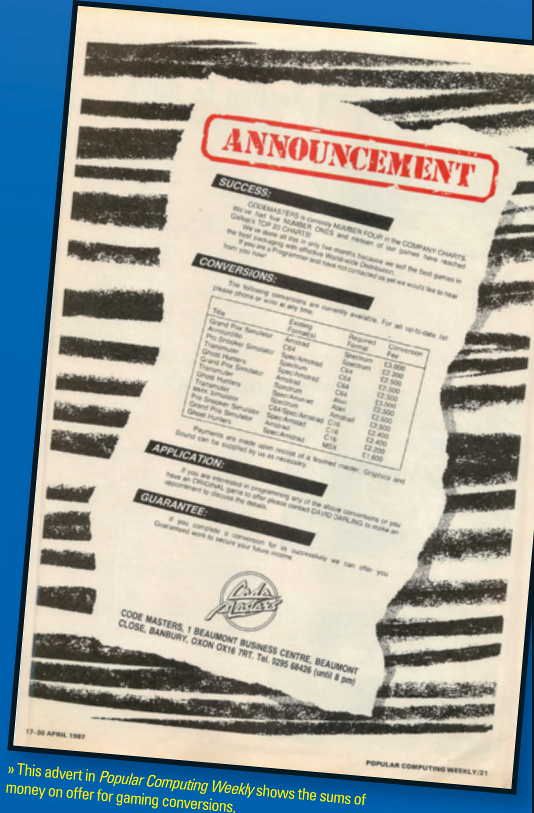
■ Endorsed by the West-Indian cricketer Brian Lara, this game for up to four players made its debut for the PC in 1994 and it went on a long run of 13 years (with the franchise being known as *Shane Warne Cricket* Down Under). It was highly successful, with the Mega Drive release the following year topping the United Kingdom charts for a lengthy ten weeks. As well as allowing players access to all of the international sides, it impressed gamers with its faithful adaptation of the actual real-life game's systems, solid mechanics and realistic looks. While bowling entailed a bit of inevitable button mashing, the game also required a good level of skill from gamers in its other elements.



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 1998

WINDOWS, PLAYSTATION, GAME BOY COLOR

■ *TOCA Touring Car Championship* brought 3D realism to Codemasters' driving titles in 1997 and *Colin McRae Rally* built on the publisher's renewed drive for racing game success a year later. Influenced by *Sega Rally, Colin McRae Rally* was a simulation based on the year's World Rally Championship season and it featured 12 accurately-reproduced rally cars that could be raced across eight rallies (seven of them official). After four sequels, the franchise took a three-year hiatus, returning as *Colin McRae: Dirt* in 2007, the year the rally driver tragically died. The *Dirt* series has since continued ever since with the latest, the PS4 version of *Dirt Rally,* released in April this year.


ANNOUNCEMENT

SUCCESS:

CONVERSIONS:

APPLICATION:

GUARANTEE:

CODE MASTERS, 1 BEAUMONT BUSINESS CENTRE, BEAUMONT CLOSE, BANBURY, OXON OX16 7RT. Tel. 0295 68426 (until 8 pm)

17-30 APRIL 1987

POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY/21

» This advert in *Popular Computing Weekly* shows the sums of money on offer for gaming conversions.



CREATING THE COVERS

We chat to the man who penned early Codemasters artwork

Each of the tape inlays of Codemasters' 8-bit releases have a familiar look, allowing them to be instantly recognisable on the shelves of retailers. The Codemasters logo sat bottom-centre, the format was splashed in the top-right corner and white boxes with black text gave various snippets of information. The back of the boxes had a yellow, jagged splash and screenshots.

Alistair Graham created the cover for *Fantasy World Dizzy*, *Pub Trivia Simulator* and *Olli & Lisa 3* among others. "For *Dizzy*, the brief would have asked for certain elements in the game in question, so dragons and volcanoes, and I would always suggest items that I thought would be appropriate," he says.

"I used to present a quite-finished pencil rough to get the image approved before going to final colour. There weren't many cartoon covers being produced for computer games back then at the high level of drawing that I could deliver."






» Many gamers consider *Fantasy World* the best game in the *Dizzy* series. It's hard not to disagree.

noticed that as time went on, the sales were not really dropping off. Instead they were growing. Fan mail was arriving at the office and there were lots of letters from passionate players who were stuck. *Dizzy* was becoming a sleeper hit and so Codemasters and the Oliver twins agreed it would be a good idea to make a sequel. *Treasure Island Dizzy* was released in 1988 and a best-selling franchise began to emerge.

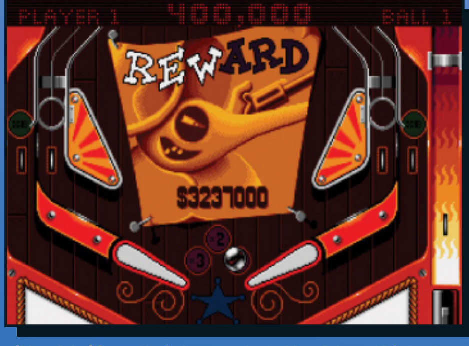
They were good times. The publisher's bombardment of the trade press with full-page adverts in *CTW* magazine had made their mark with retailers, and Codemasters fought like crazy for every millimetre of shelf space, even providing free racking when a retailer bought its contents. It put the company in a strong position. "The Darlings knew exactly what they wanted and where the business was going," says Bruce. "They were tough negotiators and the interests of the business always came first."

Andy Payne, who formed the games production specialist The Producers in 1988, saw that at first hand. "I didn't really work with the Darlings brothers as such, back in the day but I did work with their father, who is a formidable man in so many ways," he says. "We used to supply the boxes and plastic trays for cassette and disc-based products and he was a hard negotiator. He knew what he wanted and he knew how to get it, but he was always fair."

James' diligence and determination was evident in 1990. Codemasters had released the Game Genie, a cheat system which was originally designed for the NES. Created over six months, it allowed players to modify game data in order to cheat or access functions that were not being used. Codemasters felt it would be a perfect way to enter the console market, allowing players complete control of other developers' games.



» [NES] *The Ultimate Stuntman* was developed by Codemasters and published by Camerica. A switch could be used for both NTSC and PAL compatibility.



» [Mega Drive] Created by Codemasters for the Mega Drive and PC, *Psycho Pinball* had four themed tables, including the Wild West.

But Nintendo had other ideas. It felt the Game Genie was contributing to copyright infringement and it sued Galoob, the seller of the device in the US and Canada. This was a setback for David and Richard's ambitions to enter the console market. They had been to CES in Las Vegas and noted how big Nintendo was becoming. They were keen to take a slice, yet Nintendo wouldn't talk to them.

James, however, believed that Codemasters had done nothing to infringe Nintendo's copyright. He said the team had been diligent in ensuring everything was above board and he was confident Nintendo would lose the case. He was right. Although Nintendo initially prevented Galoob from selling the cartridges, its case was ultimately unsuccessful in court. Codemasters responded by pumping more resources into the device and creating it for other consoles too. By the start of 1993, more than half of the company was devoted to developing the add-on and it proved to be a massive hit.

The Nineties was a period of great growth for Codemasters. Now operating from a converted farm in Warwickshire and expanding rapidly the company saw their games flying off the shelves. There were more *Dizzy* titles, notably *Fantasy World Dizzy* and *Magicland Dizzy* and while Codemasters was starting to leave its simulators behind, it was also delving into its back catalogue and reselling its older titles within four-game compilations that retailed at £2.99 and later £3.99.

Dizzy spin-offs such as *Kwik Snax*, fun cutesy titles including *Turbo The Tortoise* and a new character in Seymour kept the pennies rolling in but there were some mishaps along the way. The Codies got a bloody nose for releasing *Pro Boxing Simulator* when it became

TIMELINE

1986
- Codemasters is founded by brothers David and Richard Darling and father James.
- Based in a business park, it releases *BMX Simulator* and goes on to launch many other sport-based sims.

1987
- Dizzy makes his first appearance on the C64 Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum.
- Codemasters is so prolific and successful that its games make up 27 per cent of the weekly Gallup charts.

1988
- *Treasure Island Dizzy* is released and the franchise is truly born.

1990
- A cheat device for the NES is launched, the Game Genie. Nintendo (unsuccessfully) sues US distributor Galoob.

1991
- *Micro Machines* becomes an unlicensed game for the NES. A new Codemasters logo is unveiled.

1992
- The Aladdin Deck Enhancer is showcased for the NES. It gets around the need for a 10NES lockout chip.

1993
- Codemasters leaves the budget market behind and largely concentrates on consoles.

1995
- A host of sports game are made from *Pete Sampras Tennis '96* to Jonah *Lomu Rugby*.



» [Mega Drive] *Micro Machines 2* was an incredible sequel that greatly improved on the original.

apparent that it was a rerelease of an old Superior game called *By Fair Means Or Foul*. It was also starting to look over its shoulder as the stalwarts of full-price such as Ocean and US Gold were releasing games on their own budget labels including The Hit Squad and Kixx. "But they were old games at budget prices whereas we were doing new games at budget prices and more people were interested in the new games," says David.

Codemasters had dabbled in the full-price market itself, particularly on the 16-bit home computers but found it was a tricky one to crack and so it had started to pull back. Instead, more and more attention was being given to the consoles: *Micro Machines* had been released in 1991 for the NES and it had performed phenomenally well. "It was a great multiplayer [game]," says David, "It built on the concept *of BMX Simulator* which was the first four-player game that we were aware of on home computers.". By 1992, Codemasters was turning over £3.5 million in 1992 and it is understood to have rocketed to £10 million the following year. It had 75 employees and lots of freelancers.

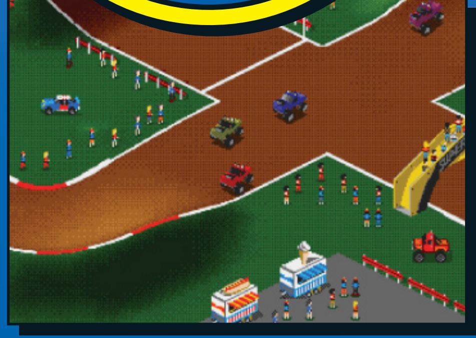
"I was 20 when I started working at Codemasters in 1992, and most of the developers were freelance," says coder Ashley Hogg. "There was a fair amount of structure but it still felt a bit 'Wild West' and loose at times. It certainly grew over the next few years whilst I was there."

Programmers worked in their own rooms, allowing them to concentrate on their work and they tended to graft on their own projects, sometimes doing more than one thing at once. Ashley, for instance, was a coder on *CJ In The USA* and on *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy* but he was also a musician.

"I think it was fairly common back then," he says. "I always wanted to do C64 music so had to learn programming to produce my own audio drivers. In the end I felt I had more of a knack for programming but enjoyed doing music when I could." There was cross-pollination of ideas and code between everyone and the hiring policy asked managers to only take on staff who had better skills in some areas than they did, making for a more equal environment.

The innovation also continued. In 1994, Codemasters introduced the J-Cart for the Sega Mega Drive, a hugely innovative product which placed two additional gamepad ports on the cartridge. It made its debut with *Tennis All Stars* but it came into its own with *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*. "It was obviously such a great idea," says Ashley. "It suited the next *Micro Machines* game perfectly. The whole thing was

"There was a fair amount of structure but it still felt a bit 'Wild West' and loose at times"
Ashley Hogg


» [Mega Drive] Developed by Acid Software, the Mega Drive version of *Super Skidmarks* was published by Codemasters.

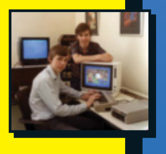
- **1998** A range of tune creation-programs is created, starting with *Music*. *Colin McRae Rally* is released.
- **2001** Military simulator *Operation Flashpoint* is released on the PC.
- Work begins on the fantasy *MMO Dragon Empires* but it is cancelled three years later.
- **2005** Codemasters benefits from a cash injection from Benchmark Capital Europe. Rod Cousens becomes CEO.
- Codemasters Online Gaming and Codemasters Mobile launch.
- **2007** David and Richard Darling leave Codemasters. Equity group Balderton Capital buys the company.
- **2008** Codemasters buys Sega Racing Studio and Swordfish Studios which is rebranded Codemasters Birmingham.
- **2010** Reliance Big Entertainment buys a 50 per cent share in Codemasters and ups it to 60.41 three years later.
- **2012** A major emphasis is put on racing with the creation of the brand 'Codemasters Racing'.
- **2015** CEO Rod Cousens leaves Codemasters to join *Runescape* maker, Jagex.
- **2016** Evolution Studios, closed by Sony in March 2016, is reopened by Codemasters.



THE DNA OF CODEMASTERS

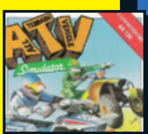
What made the long-standing developer so good? Well, we'll tell you…

FAMILY AFFAIR



■ Even though Richard and David sold their stake in Codemasters in 2007, their strong involvement, along with that other family members, makes it difficult to extract the Darlings from the DNA and history of the company.

BUDGET TITLES



■ Codemasters' games in the Eighties were released on cassette as budget titles at a cost of £1.99 (rising later to £2.99 and then £3.99). The idea was that the titles would be of full-price quality but at a pocket-friendly price.

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY



■ Whether it was the release of The *CD Games Pack* in 1989 or the creation of the Game Genie, Aladdin Deck Enhancer and J-Cart devices, Codemasters constantly looked for ways of enhancing the games you played.

SELF-QUOTATION



■ The first game to slap the words "Absolutely Brilliant!" on the inlay was *Jet Ski Simulator*. It was a quote from employee Stuart Regan and it was typical of how the company printed its own quotes on the back of the box.

RECOGNISABLE CHARACTERS



■ Dizzy aside, there was the elephant CJ, the slug Steg, the Viking Spike and the Dizzy-inspired Seymour to name but a few, each tending to appeal to younger gamers.

NINTENDO



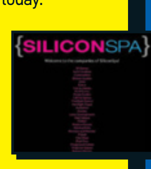
■ Whether it was achieving success by publishing games on Nintendo's consoles or becoming involved in a court battle for the right to sell the Game Genie, Codemasters and Nintendo were heavily linked.

RACING GAMES



■ Codemasters was heavily involved in racing games. It published *Grand Prix Simulator* and *Moto Cross Simulator*, *750cc Grand Prix*, *Micro Machines*, *TOCA* and *Colin McRae Rally*. It continues its racing heritage today.

SILICON SPA



■ Codemasters is based in Leamington Spa which has become a hotbed of gaming talent. Companies such as Radiant Worlds, Supersonic Software, Aqua Pacific, Big Big Studios and Kwalee have been spun out of the company.

only possible due to being able to make their own cartridges outside of Sega's licensing model."

Such innovation fostered a can-do attitude and for the developers at the top of their game, the rewards were great. David said some of the top developers – paid on a royalty basis – were earning £300,000 each year.

Codemasters' expertise saw it sail into the 32-bit era as some of its rivals either folded or sold up. The company certainly had no problems with the move to CD – it had dabbled with a compact disc compilation for the Spectrum in 1989 and Ashley had worked – albeit alone – on a *Micro Machines* conversion for Philips CD-i in 1994 – "Philips approached Codemasters as they were trying to turn around the failing multimedia machine into more of a gaming system," he says. "Codemasters weren't really that keen, but Philips were offering some modest cash."

The tricky part was picking the right machine to work with – "We had a strong feeling the PlayStation would work well," says David, "it was a brilliant console," – but Codemasters appeared to take its time, still working on Mega Drive games into 1996. But in 1997, it made *Sampras Extreme Tennis*, *Micro Machines V3* and *TOCA Championship Racing* for the PlayStation. The following year, it launched *Colin McRae Rally* and it also created tune creation software called *Music*, a franchise which continued until 2004. With the exception of *Micro Machines 64 Turbo* which was released for the Nintendo 64, Codemasters had become loyal to Sony's console and it was picking up awards from leading videogame bodies and magazines for its output.



» [PS2] *Micro Machines 4* appeared on the PS2. Codemasters is still working on the franchise to this day.

"It all felt pretty exciting to be involved in an industry that was really beginning to approach the mainstream for the first time and at a British company that was leading the charge," says Natalie Griffiths, who had joined as the senior designer in marketing and promotional materials. "I think it was only in retrospect that I really began to appreciate the formative impact that Codemasters was having on the growing UK games scene."

At the start of the millennium, Codemasters was in a great place. It won a Queen's Award for Enterprise while David Darling was named the UK Entrepreneur Of The Year. *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* was outselling *Pokémon Red & Blue* by three units to one, topping the charts after just three days on sale and doubling the launch weekend of its predecessor. The publisher also announced that it was going to be making games for the Xbox, which was due for release the following year, and it unveiled *Insane*, a 4x4 off-road racer for the PC which was going to be the first game to utilise the Codemasters' multiplayer network for online play.

Success continued for the British studio. In 2001, *Operation Flashpoint* became the 60th Codemasters game to get to number one. The development of the MMORPG *Dragon Empires* was also announced: Ted Carron, now studio head, was put in place as its producer (although, after a series of delays, it would never see the light of day). For the next few years, it continued to rely on its big hitters, from *Operation Flashpoint* to *Colin McRae*. It even buried the hatchet with Nintendo by announcing it would start developing for GameCube in 2003.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



DAVID DARLING

■ In 2007, David decided to take a break from videogames and he toyed with the idea of producing robots. A year after he left, he was awarded a CBE and in 2011, he decided to make a return to gaming. He set up Kwalee which employs former *Micro Machines* designer Andrew Graham in 2011. Jason Falcus, who also produced games for Codemasters, is the COO.



RICHARD DARLING

■ Richard is far more private than his brother and maintains a low profile. Like David, however, he couldn't stay away from videogaming for long and he can be found imparting his vast knowledge at Kwalee with David. Kwalee specialises in making mobile games, producing titles such as *Time Monkeys*, *Wave Champions* and *Farm Fighters*.



» [PlayStation] Codemasters quickly built a reputation from the PlayStation onwards for making excellent racing simulators.

"We had a strong feeling that the PlayStation would work well"
David Darling



» [PlayStation 2] Codemasters continued to publish the games of other developers, such as *Worms 4: Mayhem*.

Yet by the mid-Noughties, Codemasters was being slowly taken over by Balderton Capital which was amassing an ever-larger share in the publisher and there were also some changes at the top. In 2004 – the year Codemasters allowed the Commodore 64 version of *BMX Simulator* and *Treasure Island Dizzy* to be downloaded online to celebrate its 18th anniversary – David took over as chairman from James, who remained on the board of directors. In 2005, Rod Cousens joined as CEO and Tony Williams as COO. The Darlings eventually sold their shares to Balderton Capital and left the company in 2007.

But even though Codemasters had lost its founders, the publisher continued much as before. At Gamescom in Leipzig, it promoted playable premieres for *Clive Barker's Jericho*, *Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty*, *Colin McRae: DIRT* and *The Lord of the Rings Online*. The company also reached an agreement in 2008 to take over the Sega Racing Studio in Solihull, welcoming more than 40 people to the company.

Over the past eight years, it has pushed more and more into the production of racing games. There was much excitement surrounding *Race Driver: GRiD* and it secured the worldwide publishing rights to the next-gen racer *Fuel* from Asobo Studios which had been in development for more than four years and had a playfield which stretched for 5,000 square miles. It was making such great inroads into the racing genre that it was handed the Grand Prix Award by Develop in 2009.

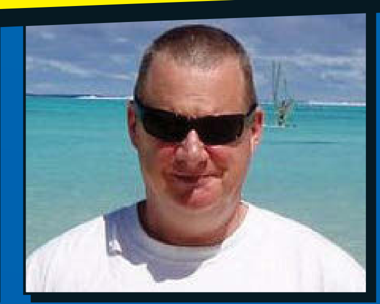
Codemasters was taken over yet again in 2010, this time by Reliance Big Entertainment and it began to restructure two years later, converting £21 million of expensive debt into equity to put it on a sounder financial footing. It was also decided to transfer *Lord Of The Rings Online* to Turbine but since then, the greatest emphasis has been on its racing games including the *F1* series, *Dirt* and *Grid* and new regular iterations of these franchises are proving popular.

In many ways, its reliance on driving games is no surprise. It's how the company began and it's the staple genre that it has relied upon time and time again. Codemasters has carved a niche for itself and it looks set to continue this way for a good while to come. It is, we have to say, absolutely brilliant to see. *



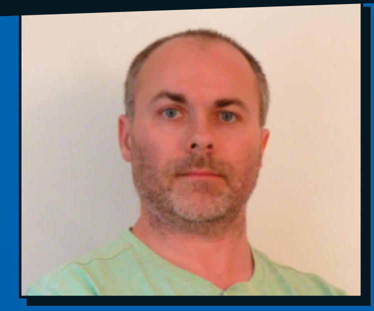
JAMES DARLING

■ It would appear gaming is very much in the blood of the Darlings. In 2011, it was announced that James had been appointed by David as the chairman of Kwalee, acting as a global company ambassador and working in a non-executive role. James has worked with his sons from 1982, when they set up Galactic Software, and subsequently Codemasters in 1986.



BRUCE EVERISS

■ Bruce left Codemasters in 1987 but he made a return in 2001 for a further two years, running the PR operation there as head of communications. He owned the All Formats Computer Fairs until 2007, worked as the chief marketing officer at Kwalee from 2011 to 2013 and he now works as a successful marketing and management consultant.



ASHLEY HOGG

■ Lots of programmers from Codemasters have remained around Leamington Spa area and Ashley is no exception. After leaving Codemasters in 1995, he became a programmer at Runecraft, Blitz Games and Playground Games and he now works at Radiant Worlds, run by the Oliver twins (who also ran Blitz Games up until 2013).



THE OLIVER TWINS

■ Philip and Andrew left Codemasters in 1990 to form their own company, Interactive Studios (later Blitz Games), They also founded the trade body TIGA and received honorary doctorates in 2008 from Coventry University. Blitz went bust in 2013 but the Olivers re-employed many of their former employees at their current company, Radiant Worlds.



Super Game Boy

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **RELEASED:** 1994
» **COST:** £49.99 (LAUNCH), £10+ (TODAY, UNBOXED), £15+ (TODAY, BOXED)

After five years of dominating the handheld console scene, there was only one market left for the Game Boy to conquer: the home. While the Super Game Boy didn't quite hit the world-conquering heights of the portable machine, it did allow millions of SNES owners the opportunity to play some rather excellent games they previously didn't have access to. There were good reasons to do so, too – displaying the games on a traditional TV rather than the Game Boy's LCD screen completely removed all of the display blurring problems that hampered fast-scrolling games on the portable machine. Limited colour support could be added to every game, and certain titles added extended support for the peripheral, allowing for more complex colour schemes and customised border illustrations.

As good as it was, the Super Game Boy wasn't perfect – the device ran ever so slightly faster than an actual Game Boy, and didn't include a port for link-up communications with another console. These issues were rectified by the later Japan-only Super Game Boy 2. The device proved popular, though, and Nintendo would later return to the same concept of handheld games at home with the Game Boy Advance Player for the Gamecube. *



One of the very first games to be enhanced for the Super Game Boy also happens to be one of the very finest. What initially seems to be a straightforward conversion of the arcade game turns into an all-new puzzle platformer, and sparse visuals give way to carefully colourised graphics. As is the case for most great Game Boy games, it succeeds on its own terms and doesn't need a TV or anything else to succeed. All the same, adding them doesn't hurt at all, and this is arguably the best way to experience a classic arcade revival.





Super Game Boy fact

■ Certain games from before the Super Game Boy's launch were given special palettes within the Super Game Boy hardware – these include *Metroid II: Return Of Samus*, *Kirby's Pinball Land* and *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*.



CRA
BANDI

Nintendo had Mario, Sega had Sonic, Namco had Pac-Man. As the dawn of the PlayStation era began to rise it was clear Sony needed its own mascot, and it found one in the unlikeliest of marsupials

» Crash bares a striking resemblance to *Looney Tunes'* Tasmanian Devil.

ASH

ICOOT

If you stop and think about it, there's quite a large number of PlayStation icons from the PSone era. Lara Croft, Cloud Strife and even the colourful beanie of PaRappa will likely come to mind when you consider the marketing pieces of the time. But among the numerous new faces of this exciting, upstart of a console none were so prevalent as *Crash Bandicoot*, an immediately eye-catching character whose frantic behaviour and Nineties cool charm was practically imprinted on his skin in his various posters, CD booklets and in-store banners. All the other characters needed context to stand out, while Crash landed in the 32-bit generation perfectly. In many ways he was decrepit, of a 16-bit age where bipedal animals with extraordinary abilities was the norm. The PSone had already been moving the industry far beyond that, and here was Crash – yet one more platforming creature that should, by rights, have been left to fail like so many before him. But Crash actually epitomised everything about the PlayStation at the time; he had attitude, he was unique and his game helped to bring the platforming genre kicking and screaming into the 3D generation. Crash was to cutesy platformer mascots what the PSone was to the videogames industry: a swift kick to the balls and a middle-finger to the status quo.

Today, most know the creative minds behind the original *Crash Bandicoot*, Naughty Dog might be a powerhouse developer these days, but prior to its seminal PlayStation game it wasn't quite the significant name it is now. In fact, it's output prior to *Crash Bandicoot* had been insignificant at best, awful at worst. The developer was just two people at the time, close friends Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin. While the pair had worked on projects before, it was their 3DO title *Way Of The Warrior* that would turn Naughty Dog into the established name it would go on to become. "I'm sorry, those guys were lucky as shit," says David Siller, one of the key producers on *Crash Bandicoot*. "They had done some real so-so products – *Keef The Thief* and other stuff that they had done, some of it published at EA. They'd invested in their own 3DO development system and those two guys developed a game on the 3DO. We used to call it *White Trash Warriors*, but it was a fighting game like *Mortal Kombat* called *Way Of The Warrior*." David goes on to explain that 3DO had a booth at CES one year and, by chance, Naughty Dog would be placed right next to Universal Interactive Studios who was there showing off its first videogame, *Jurassic Park Interactive*.

"Apparently in the course of the three or four days [Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin got to know] Mark Cerny and Rob Biniaz who were running Universal Interactive and needed developers, so they struck a deal with these guys. They said, 'Look, we'll move the two of you lock, stock and barrel to Los Angeles and we'll give you ▶

» [PlayStation] The opening stage of *Crash* might not be the toughest, but it certainly is memorable.



» [PlayStation] Bonus stages were integral for 100 per cent completion in later games. In the original, they were just a bonus.



» [PlayStation] Though it wasn't the first game to feature a chase, it did popularise that style of platforming gameplay.

MEET THE CAST



CRASH BANDICOOT

■ The eponymous hero, once an ordinary bandicoot before an experiment by Dr Neo Cortex gave him exceptional abilities and a lust for crate destruction. Originally named Willie The Wombat.



AKU AKU

■ A mysterious floating tribal mask and a penchant for the force of good. As a companion to Crash, he keeps him safe from danger and can even empower the bandicoot with invulnerability.



DR NEO CORTEX

■ This big-headed (literally) evil scientist is the central antagonist for Crash's adventures, often building nefarious contraptions as part of his experiments to create an army of mutant animal warriors.



N. BRIO

■ The original assistant to Dr Neo Cortex and a returning character throughout the series. N. Brio's crazed and insane remarks are a good suggestion of his mental state (note the loose screws in his head).



RIPPER ROO

■ The second boss encounter in the original *Crash Bandicoot*, and one of the more recognisable, too. The straightjacket highlights just how crazy he is, a side-effect of prolonged exposure to Cortex's Evolvo Ray.





» [PlayStation] There were many *Mario Kart* clones at the time, but *CTR* stood out as a challenger to Nintendo's throne.



» [PlayStation] There were a number of new features added into *Crash Bandicoot 2*

▶ offices at Universal.'" And with that, Naughty Dog was locked in: it was to produce a 3D platformer with the backing from Universal as part of a three-game deal.

With the deal in place it was time for Naughty Dog to get to work, and new hires were brought in to bulk out the team and get the project underway. David – who had been working at Sunsoft – was brought into Universal Interactive where he was to be a producer, overlooking the development of key titles. Immediately David was put to work with Naughty Dog, on a title that was then known as *Willie The Wombat*. "I was told that I would be the producer of those guys," recalls David. "There was a six-page story that had been typed up in a nice font, I think by Jason Rubin. And it told the story of Willie The Wombat, and it talked about how the game was going to play. It would be third-person, camera-behind-the-character, and there would also be some side view and it would transition from one to the other."

With Andy Gavin working hard on the technology of the game, Jason Rubin – alongside David Siller – would begin creating the characters, the setting and the story for *Willie The Wombat*. We're told of different milestones the team was given, the initial being where the technology side of the software is proven to be up and running. "But the next objective is first-playable," David states, "and what that really was as far as the contract meant was that they needed to have Willie The Wombat running around in some kind of environment." This particular milestone is common in games development, and gives the publisher an early sign of the game's progress and potential. "Well, they failed that milestone," says David, "and Mark Cerny came to me and he said, 'Look, I want you to now design levels and you come in and show them how the game needs to play.' So I did that. I designed the levels that ended up being at the end of the game."

With the game now up to scratch and Universal's milestone met, David Siller, Mark Cerny and Rob Biniaz – founding president of UIS – went to show the game to Sony, a meeting that proved to be a huge success for the trio. "We took the prototype to get concept approval and Bernie Stolar saw it. The man is brilliant, he saw it right away – called people into the little conference room to get them to look at it, and he had his assistant go and get paperwork that he would sign immediately." *Willie The Wombat*, it would seem, was set to be an early PlayStation title. Except, by that point, this acrobatic mammal had already encountered a name change.



COCO BANDICOOT

■ Originally appearing in *Crash Bandicoot 2*, Coco is Crash's sister. The complete opposite to her brother, she's a level-headed whizz-kid with a computer and fond of riding jet skis and tigers.



UKA UKA

■ The Yin to Aku Aku's Yang, this mask represents the forces of evil and is the driving force for many of Cortex's bumbling plans. His eternal battle with Aku Aku is the foundation for *Crash Bash*'s minigames.



N. GIN

■ If the pun here wasn't enough, then the working engine attached to this scientist's is in fact from an experiment gone wrong. He managed to stabilise it as a life support machine, but it cost him his sanity.



TINY TIGER

■ Irony clearly wasn't lost on Cortex when he named this minion. Supposedly the first of Cortex's experiments in genetic mutation, Tiny is a significant boss character throughout the series.

> **"Mark Cerny came to me and he said, 'Look, I want you to design levels and you come in and show them how the game needs to play'"**
> David Siller

But what happened to turn the name from *Willie The Wombat* to the more marketable, more catchy, more 'PlayStation' name of *Crash Bandicoot*? "*Willie The Wombat* was what Jason and Andy loved," David says. "They wanted that name. Trademark searches were done by Universal to try and trademark *Willie The Wombat*." What they found was a trademark by Hudson for its action-RPG released in Japan on the Sega Saturn also named *Willie The Wombat*. Though the game rose to little prominence, it was enough to dissuade Universal from running with that name. "We had everyone in this huge room at Universal and we put a list together," says David. "We said we have to have another name, we have to have it now." During this meeting many names were thrown about until someone suggested Crash Bandicoot. The name stuck and the name was changed; *Crash Bandicoot* was born.

It's interesting to consider that, without the forceful hand of copyright law holding the original name back, *Crash Bandicoot* could've suffered a different fate. *Willie The Wombat* sounded ancient, the sort of title you'd see on the front of a cartridge, not on the CDs of the then-modern-feeling PSone. Even now, it's easy to see the importance of that name change, even if the name alone had no effect on the punkish attitude we've come to love Crash for. *Crash Bandicoot* was released in September 1996, almost a year to the day since the launch of the PlayStation itself. And, as it would turn out, it was an instant success for all involved.

Since Universal had signed Naughty Dog up for a three-game deal it was clear what the next ▶

CRASH BY NUMBERS

40.38 MILLION
Copies of Crash games sold



6,344
Crates in the original trilogy



52
Characters featuring across the series



18
Different games released since 1996

20:26
Fastest completion time of Crash Bandicoot: Warped's Time Trial stages



16
Different dangers Crash has had to run from, including a dinosaur, sharks and a tsunami



AS SEEN IN…

The wily bandicoot has spun his way off into other games, let's take a look…



SPYRO THE DRAGON: THE ETERNAL NIGHT

■ Spyro and Crash share many similarities. Both are stars of platforming games, both began on PSone and both were designed by Charles Zembillas. It's no surprise, then, to see Crash cameo in the *Spyro* game *The Eternal Night*, where he can be spotted in the frozen waters of the Celestial Caves.



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

■ This was perhaps the most unexpected cameo, with Naughty Dog paying homage to the famed character it created in its epic *Uncharted* adventure. It was done in such a classy way, too, introduced with little fanfare as Nathan Drake teases his wife Elena as he tries to beat her score on the "TV game thingy".



SKYLANDERS: IMAGINATORS

■ Rumours and speculation of a new *Crash* game have been popping up for years. One example came via a photo of *Skylanders* developer Vicarious Visions where a poster of a redesigned Crash was spotted in the background. Well, as it turns out, this developer is including the bandicoot in the upcoming *Skylanders* game, *Imaginators*.



TY THE TASMANIAN TIGER

■ While not a cameo in another game, Crash Bandicoot was used – alongside Spyro and Sonic – in an advert for *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*. In the advert, the three stars are seen in a hospital battered, bandaged and sporting boomerangs lodged into their bodies. It was a result of aggressive marketing from EA, of course.



» [Xbox] *Nitro Kart* was at least a very good-looking game, but that's really all it was. It was a modern version of *Crash Team Racing*, and that was it.

▶ game was to be, and so work on *Crash Bandicoot 2* began almost immediately. Though David would leave Universal and go on to work at Capcom, many of his earlier gameplay designs and sketches would come to be used in the *Crash* sequel. "Well, I left a lot of design stuff that was revamped," says David, detailing boss encounters in particular that they couldn't include in the original game. He had even previously created design specs on new elements for *Aero The Acro-Bat 3D* – a game series that David had worked on and brought the rights over to Universal with him – and many of these were used in Naughty Dog and Insomniac's games. "Mark Cerny had that copied and circled to both Naughty Dog and Insomniac to see where they might be influenced or wean ideas off of it since I was leaving it and *Aero* was going with me. They took whatever ideas they could."

With the popularity and success of *Crash Bandicoot* secured, Universal set about making sure this was a title worth holding on to. It increased the budget to $2 million dollars to bring on talented programmers and additional artists. Before long, Evan Wells – now copresident of Naughty Dog – would be brought into the team. The two sequels released within a year of each other, with *Cortex Strikes Back* releasing in October 1997 and the third game developed by Naughty Dog releasing in November 1998. In both cases, the increased manpower and budgets made for significant improvements. With *Cortex Strikes Back* a new Warp Room was added, providing a more non-linear format to the game's progression, while improvements to the graphics, the save system and variety of the levels all helped to improve on what was an already stellar first release. Then there was *Warped*, which introduced underwater levels, motorbike stages and made Coco Bandicoot a playable character. Both were well received, and established themselves as PlayStation classics.



» [PS2] New gadgets were introduced into the franchise with *Wrath Of Cortex*, but they were mostly superficial.

Yet if we're complaining of the familiarity that these games came with, the next and final game in the series to be produced by Naughty Dog would offer something a little bit different. The fourth game began development at the same time as the third game, and utilised the new *Warped*'s motorbike levels as a template. That's because this new game was to be a racing game, utilising the colourful cast of characters for head-to-head vehicular carnage. "When it got to *Crash Team Racing* I would have done *Crash Team Off-road Racing*," explains David. "Instead of doing a derivative *Mario*-type game I would have had these suspension-like little vehicles and lots of rolling mountains that you could fly through the air on like an off-road vehicle does and if you land on someone you destroy them and score and so on." While David is correct – *CTR* was very much a clone of Nintendo's insanely-popular *Mario Kart* – it was a rare example among the copycats, it was a kart racer that stood out and could hold its own against Mario and friends. It was familiar to anyone lucky enough to have both the N64 and the PSone, with myriad weapons (many of which were copies of *Mario Kart*'s equivalent), tournaments and a battle mode. It did have its innovations, though: collecting the maximum number of Wumpa Fruit in a race would unlock an enhanced version of whichever weapon you picked up; and the time trial-mode included boxes with numbers on, that would freeze the clock and persuade the player to race down a specific route. Despite starting development at the same time as *Warped*, *Crash Team Racing* wouldn't be released on PSone until September 1999. The change in genre didn't affect the franchise's popularity; *CTR* went on to sell well over 5 million copies and received incredible praise from critics. Yet, although the Crash had already set himself in the halls of videogame fame, this would be the last time the franchise would be released with such confidence.



» [PlayStation] While Coco was a playable character in *Crash 3*, she was restricted to the vehicular levels.



» [PlayStation] The minigames available in *Crash Bash* are entertaining enough, but it had neither the quality of *Mario Party*.

"We put a list together and we said we have to have another name, we have to have it now"
David Siller

Naughty Dog ended its affiliation with *Crash Bandicoot*, and as the series began the transition to PlayStation 2, it would struggle to find the same level of appreciation.

Before the PS2, however, Sony and Universal looked to squeeze as much as they could out of Crash and company, releasing *Crash Bash* on PSone in November 2000. This four-player party game was different, to say the least, pitting the characters of the franchise in arena battles. It was a set of minigames in an attempt to leech ideas from *Mario Party*, the first of which having been released two years prior on the N64. While Eurocom's effort on the title was commendable, it lacked the quality of similar titles while the limited popularity of the PSone's Multitap meant the game's potential only appealed to a small audience. It ended up passing many people by.

It's at this point where the history of *Crash Bandicoot* becomes messy. Having built a solid foundation, all the hard work of Universal and Naughty Dog would unravel. It's hard to point the finger in any one direction, but many will agree it all begins from one source. Universal Interactive Studios had been bought out by Seagrams at this point, but it was at the end of 2000 where the company switched hands again, this time to the ▶

SLAPSTICK DEATHS

Crash is known for losing his lives in many hilarious ways



BIFF!

■ The classic death animation. Crash spins around before tumbling down.



BOOM!

■ Looks like our hero got too close to some TNT, all that's left is his footwear and eyeballs.



BURN!

■ One charcoal bandicoot – it's what you'd expect from landing on some fire.



CRUSH!

■ Not outrunning the boulder in time, Crash experiences what it's like to be a piece of paper.



SPLASH!

■ Like most heroes of the time, Crash didn't graduate from swimming school.



SQUISH!

■ Similar to the boulder death, only this time Crash tries to save face by doing a sit-up.



CHOMP!

■ This dangerous plant like to exclusively eat early PSone mascots, back luck for Crash, eh?



ZAP!

■ Like most things, Crash doesn't like being electrocuted. Who would've thought?



YIKES!

■ Crash's nightmares of being caught with his pants down come true, thanks to this swordsman.



SMOOCH!

■ We'd die of embarrassment if we were to be kissed by a frog too, to be honest.



MAKING A MASCOT

All the ingredients that went into Crash's design

■ At first, *Crash* was jokingly named *Sonic's Ass Game* due to the camera being behind the character, the character was then named *Willie The Wombat*. This was the case throughout development until a licensing search revealed that a little-known action RPG made by Hudson and released only in Japan forced a name change.

■ Besides for a handful of, 'Woah's', Crash doesn't speak. This was intentional from the start, since Naughty Dog believed that videogame characters that were voiced at the time usually only added negatively to the experience and distracted from players identifying as the character.

■ Crash doesn't have a neck, a facet that Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin had gleaned from Warner Bros' Tasmanian Devil. Naughty Dog was inspired by Taz and his crazy, destructive attitude; the Tasmanian Devil also performs an aggressive whirlwind spin.

■ The colour for Crash's fur was decided first by listing popular mascot characters and their colours, then excluding those colours. Other earthy colours were discarded so he would be discernible in-game. Other colours – like red – were excluded due to how they interacted with old TVs. Orange was the only colour left.

■ Elements, such as Crash's gloves or the lighter patches of fur, were added to the in-game model to help the player distinguish which direction the character was facing at any given time. The gloves were changed for his Xbox 360 games into tribal tattoos.

■ Crash was always planned to be a marsupial. The options at the time included bandicoot and potoroo. The opening for *Crash Bandicoot* pans into Dr Cortex's laboratory, if you look at the cages on the left of the lab you'll see other marsupials are being tested on.

■ Despite his three-quarter length jeans and Converse-style shoes being very much a part of the American punk/skateboarder scene during the Nineties and the original game's conception, this combination has actually stuck with the character throughout the decades – and it still works for him, too.





» [Xbox 360] *Crash Of The Titans* focused more heavily on combat, rather than the classic platforming gameplay of old.

▶ media powerhouse Vivendi. Almost immediately priorities changed, and with Naughty Dog busy developing *Jak And Daxter, Crash Bandicoot* would go on to be put in the hands of a number of developers in the hopes of creating something that could stick.

The first of the PS2 games would be *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex*, with new developer on the franchise, Traveller's Tales. It was to be a true open-world title and would incorporate puzzle elements. Universal, however, sought a new publishing partner and, in doing so, made an agreement with Konami to publish the game across multiple platforms, breaking its obligations with Sony. The result would be a separation between Sony, Mark Cerny – who had been designing the open-world gameplay – and Universal. While *Crash* was now open to a wider number of people, this decision had an unexpected knock-on effect. With Mark no longer on the project, Traveller's Tales was forced to return to a similar system used in the last traditional *Crash* game, *Warped*, with a system of individual stages rather than an open environment. This shift did not correspond to additional time to complete the game, and Traveller's Tales was given only 12 months to complete development. And it showed. Many ironically drew attention to the unchanged *Crash* formula, while others criticised load times and frustrating gameplay.

What followed was a barrage of titles, each failing to utilise the character in any significant way. Vicarious Visions was given control over its handheld outings, releasing *Crash Bandicoot: The Huge Adventure* in 2002, *N-Tranced* in 2003 and *Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Revenge* – a crossover with *Spyro The Dragon* – in 2004. Meanwhile, Traveller's Tales would return with *Twinsanity*, another platforming outing for the bandicoot that did little to mix things up, aside from pairing the hero and the villain (Dr Neo Cortex) together. Though it would be one of the better-received titles of the generation, it



» [PS2] *Crash Tag Team Racing* continued to rip-off *Mario Kart* this time it was *Double Dash*.



» [PS4] The fact that the original trilogy is getting an overhaul for PS4 is very exciting, hopefully it'll lead to a new (good) *Crash* era.

» [PS4] Crash and his nemesis, Dr Neo Cortex will be appearing in *Skylanders Imaginators*, coming later this year

suffered in comparison to *Jak And Daxter*, which had already been dominating the genre at this point.

There was still *Crash Bandicoot*'s spinoff to consider, too; *Crash Team Racing* had proven so popular it was believed the gold vein could be mined some more. Vicarious Visions would be given control of development of the next kart racer that would become *Crash Nitro Kart* and release in 2003. It gave the classic kart gaming a PS2 overhaul, but offered very little new. Then there was *Crash Tag Team Racing* in 2005, developed by newcomer to the series Radical Entertainment. As you'd expect from the title, *CTTR* wasn't original, mimicking the very same two-characters-per-kart gimmick that *Mario Kart* had implemented with *Double Dash*. *Crash*'s kart series had always been a little *too* much of a clone, but this was taking it a bit far. This, combined with poor controls, led to *Tag Team Racing* getting very little praise.

"It was a good kart racer," says Joe McGinn, key designer on *CTTR*, before admitting that it wasn't a "great kart racer". "I think we took on a bit too much, the scope was too much because this was a 12-month project. [The publisher] liked the idea of integrating this platformer component as well, so it was not only a kart racer but there was this theme park where you were jumping around, collecting things, interacting with characters and stuff. It wasn't bad per se, but it did add a lot to it and it did take up a lot of our resources."

Up until this point there hadn't been much in the way of 'true' oddities for the franchise. The first and only would come from Dimps, a developer which had success making *Sonic Advance* titles for the GBA. Its game, *Crash Boom Bang!*, would be the second and final party game in the series, and launched on Nintendo DS. It flopped, and was criticised for everything from its controls to its skin-deep use of the characters.

But time had come for *Crash* to move over to the next console generation, and though *Crash Tag Team Racing* hadn't been well received, Radical Entertainment would be put to task on the next two platformers – and, as it would turn out, the last two core *Crash* games. *Crash Of The Titans* would launch in 2007, bringing a feature that allowed Crash to ride on the back of beasts. *Mind Over Mutant* would release a year later, this time becoming even more of an action game as Crash could now take control of mutants and use them to dodge, counter, and even choose between light and heavy attacks. Neither game sold well. The initial high of *Crash Bandicoot* had waned and there wasn't much call for a new *Crash* game. "At that time, it wasn't old enough to be retro," says Joe. "What I mean by that is that adult gamers weren't interested in *Crash*. I think if you made a *Crash* game now, you would have more of that. Adult gamers were all playing *GTA* or *Halo*, and so it was targeted kids."

There was one more significant change for the series though that has meant we've not seen another *Crash Bandicoot* game since 2010 (*Crash Nitro Kart 2*). Around the release of *Mind Over Mutant*, Vivendi merged with Activision and with the publisher now in charge, its ruling eye would fall on Crash. As fond as many would recall the PSone era, it was clear it was an underperforming series and Activision isn't a company to back products that won't appeal to a mainstream audience. *Crash* has, as a result, sat barely used for more than half a decade.

Until now, that is. At E3 2016 this year Sony unveiled a new *Crash Bandicoot*. Well, kind of. In teaming up with Activision to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the character, the publisher will be releasing *Crash Bandicoot Remastered Collection* for PS4 which will recreate the first three PSone games. It's a baiting move, but it proves that the hero hasn't been forgotten. Depending on the sales of the remaster, we may see Crash return properly. For once, it seems, the future of this iconic character could be the hands (or wallets) of gamers. ★





JIM HUETHER

He was at Atari during the heyday of the 2600 and at Sega when the 'Dream' began. Jim Huether invites Paul Drury into the hot tub

If you've ever seen the documentary *Once Upon Atari*, made by *E.T.* and *Yars' Revenge* coder Howard Scott Warshaw, you'll recognise Jim Huether as the laid-back and candid source of many of the film's most entertaining revelations. With a degree in Electrical Engineering, Jim joined Atari as a programmer just as the 2600 launched, and he produced some interesting original titles in the late Seventies before the release of *Space Invaders* really upped the profile of the console. He was there when Warner took over Atari and enjoyed plenty of the excesses of the glory days in the early Eighties, as well as endured the pains of corporate management and financial collapse. He later became a producer at both Epyx and Sega Of America and worked on the early designs for what would become the latter's final console, the Dreamcast.



» [Apple II] Jim worked on the Apple II version of the original *California Games*, as well as the sequel.

We recognise you as the fierce knight on the front of the Atari 2600 *Warlords* box. Should we address you as Sir Jim?
[Laughs], just call me Mister Warlord.

How did that come about?
I was walking down the hall at Atari and the guy that did the art, Steve Hendricks, was coming the other way. He was putting his hands in front of his face like he was making a frame and said, 'How would you like to be a warlord?' I'm like, 'Huh?' They had me put on this suit of armour and took a bunch of photos of me doing all these poses and did all the art around that.

You joined Atari in 1977. As well as your ability to look like a medieval knight, what else do you think the company saw in you?
After I got out of Rice University, I worked at Sylvania, a Department Of Defense contractor, doing top-secret real-time assembly language programming, so I knew how to code tightly. They thought I'd be able to program for the 6502 processor in the Atari 2600.

Top secret, you say?
I can't say too much. Basically, it involved intercepting enemy communications in real time.

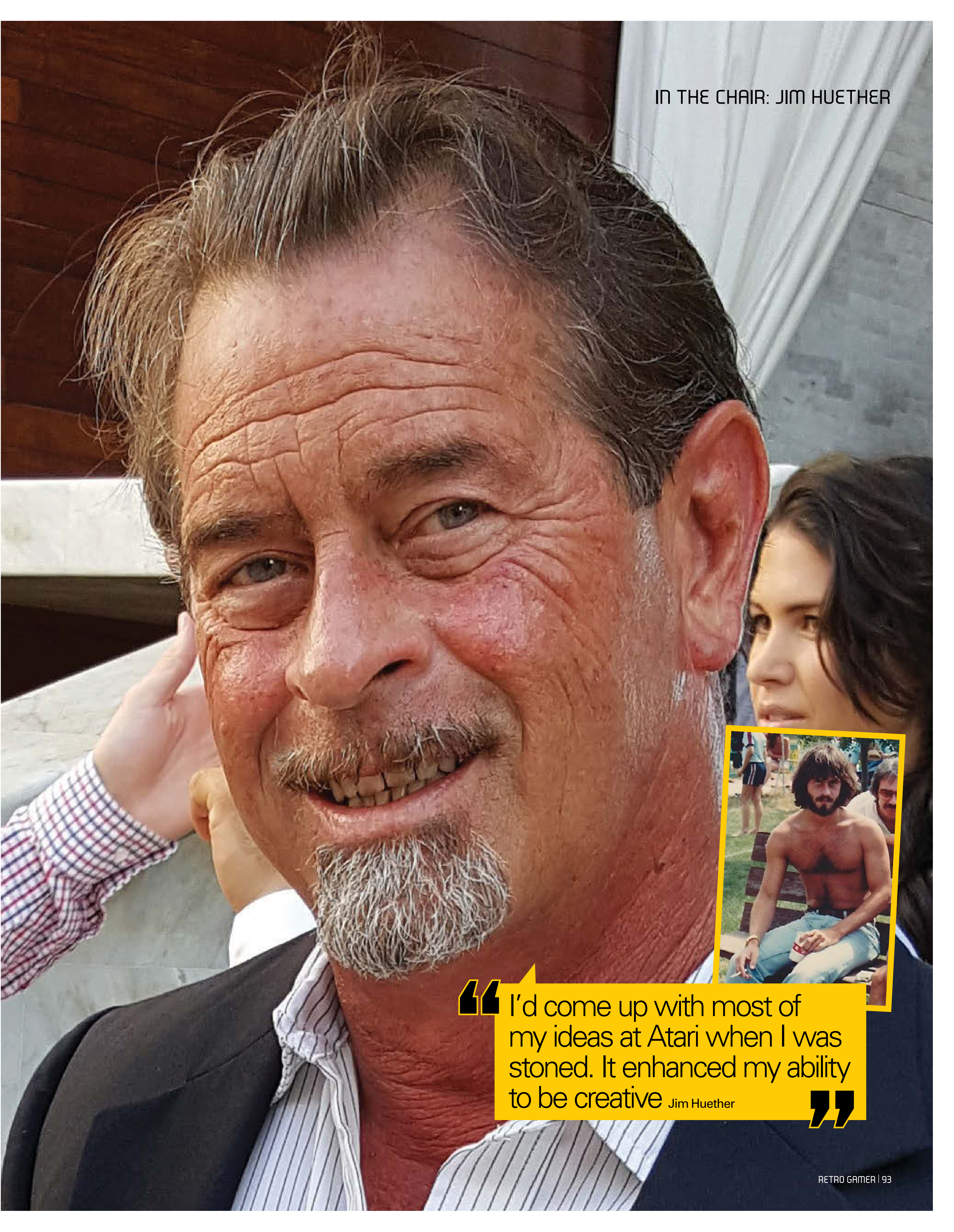
You didn't have experience making games, then?
None whatsoever. I wasn't an avid gamer but I saw the opportunity to do animations that came alive and put some element of artificial intelligence into them. Then I discovered the limited capacity of the 2600 and realised that would have to wait…

When you arrived at Atari, did you get much of an induction?
It was pretty much, 'Here's the manual, here's a development system, come up with a game and in about six months we want to see it almost done.' But the other programmers there, we'd all look at one another's games and give and get feedback.

Your first published game *was Flag Capture* in 1978, which plays a little like a head-to-head version of *Minesweeper*.
Two players is just more fun. The main gripes people had with *Flag Capture* were that the graphics were terrible and some people didn't get it. Of the people that 'got it', they absolutely loved the game and there wasn't much I could do with the graphics in 2K of ROM and 128 bytes of RAM, so I was really happy with it.

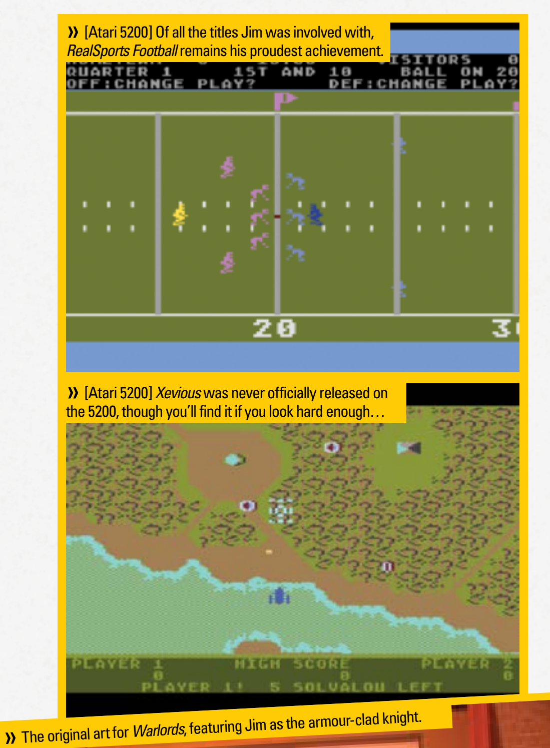
Your next game was *Sky Diver*. Was this a conversion of Owen Rubin's arcade game?
I didn't even know he was doing it. Atari put out this list every so often of game ideas and one of them was *Sky Diver*. I thought, 'That sounds cool! I think I could do a pretty good job on that.' I started working on it totally independently and was maybe halfway through when I heard Owen was working on the coin-op. I went to see what he'd done and he looked at what I had… We realised we needed sound effects so he and I went into a bathroom with a pile of paper towels and a storage scope and we recorded the sound it made when we threw super wet soggy towels at the wall. I used variations of that sampling for the sound of the parachute and the splat when the guy hits the ground.

We have heard there was a good deal of rivalry between programmers working in the coin-op division and those making games for the 2600.
That came later, when people in the consumer division were getting really good royalties from doing conversions of coin-op games and the coin-op guys weren't getting royalties that way. They felt we were stealing their games. I actually had pretty good relationships with most people in the coin-op division and Owen was a really nice guy.



“I’d come up with most of my ideas at Atari when I was stoned. It enhanced my ability to be creative” Jim Huether





» [Atari 5200] Of all the titles Jim was involved with, *RealSports Football* remains his proudest achievement.

» [Atari 5200] *Xevious* was never officially released on the 5200, though you'll find it if you look hard enough…

» The original art for *Warlords*, featuring Jim as the armour-clad knight.

Was your next game, *Steeplechase*, based on the coin-op, then?

Strangely enough, again, I started out with the name and figured out how many horses I could get on the screen and then later on I found out someone else was doing an arcade game. By that time, I had the animation and tuned it to what the 2600 could do.

Given the limitations of the machine, those horses do gallop quite impressively!

I spent a fair amount of time on that but there's only six cells [of animation] for all of it. Actually, *Steeplechase* was the first game Atari put out, at least on the home system, that research said was played more by females than males. I watched people play it and they'd name their horses and when they would fall they'd be like, 'Oh no, he's hurt!' It would really suck people in.

At the end of the Seventies, a number of your colleagues left Atari to form Activision. Were you not tempted to join them?

Those guys were all friends and kind of a clique. When they left, I kind of wished they'd have at least talked to me about it. It felt a little hurtful that I wasn't asked. But that's okay. I wasn't really interested in making huge amounts of money, I just wanted to get some kind of bonus for games I did that sold well. I had my friends at Atari and none of them were greedy.

Are these the friends you formed the 'Dumb Shits Club' with?

[Laughs] you've heard about that? We were 'Dumb Shits' because we all had Masters degrees and the guys that didn't were all making a ton more money than us. When the big royalties came in later on, I was one of the senior programmers so I was doing stuff for the new system, the 5200, and for the Atari home computers, and they didn't bring in the royalties. Then I negotiated with Ray Kassar to bump up my royalties and made good money for a year and a half. So I got kicked out of the Dumb Shits Club… but then I lost all the money. I had a wife who spent a lot and it was bad timing with the economy, so I ended up poor again and got brought back into the Club. As president.

We hear you helped Bob Polaro code the 2600 version of *RealSports Volleyball*. Did that involve much 'field research'?

Oh yeah. We would drink a lot of Screwdrivers and play two on two beach volleyball… not that well because we were, you know, drunk. Then we'd sit down and talk about the game. We'd be like, 'Hey, the sun's going down, we should put that in, that'll be cool in the background!' Bob wasn't great with writing what we called the 'real-time kernel' and I was good at that. We came up with ideas together but he wrote the whole thing – I just helped get him started.

It sounds like you really embraced the 'work hard, play hard' ethos. Did you spend much time in Atari's infamous hot tub?

Before I answer that, can I just check what you're planning to do with this interview? [We reassure Jim of **Retro Gamer**'s moral integrity and high standing in the publishing community]. Okay, in that case, yeah, I was involved with the hot tub. Atari had this really nice gym in our building and I'd work out there, rinse off and go in the hot tub, chill a little bit. Sometimes I'd go after work and some of the more fun executives would be there.

It sounds a fun place to work but do you think it actually helped programmers make better games?

Absolutely. Designing games back then involved the really tricky technical aspect and also trying to make it fun to play within limited capabilities and that required a lot of creativity. The technical part could really burn your brain out. After four hours of staring at hexadecimal code, you needed some release.

Did that 'release' ever necessitate use of, err, 'herbal' remedies'?

For me, getting stoned enhanced the ability to be creative and program. I'd come up with most of my

FIVE TO PLAY
The definitive games of Jim's career



SKY DIVER 1978

■ Before arcade conversions took priority, Atari 2600 programmers experimented with many styles and this tale of reckless parachutists and strong winds was one of the most popular titles in those formative years. It's still highly entertaining when played against a human opponent.



STEEPLECHASE 1980

■ It's a pity the paddle controllers were underused when it came to 2600 titles, because they could allow for excellent experiences. Using the button to jump and the paddle to determine the height of your leap, *Steeplechase* makes a great pairing with *Warlords* for an evening of four-player fun.



CALIFORNIA GAMES 2 1990

■ Jim was involved in producing a number of sports titles whilst at Epyx, including this mix of surfing, skating and snowboarding. Though not as successful or accomplished as the original game, it's still full of righteous touches and totally awesome wipeouts.



CASTLE OF ILLUSION 1990

■ A collaboration between Sega and Disney, Jim played a vital role in liaising with Japanese and American developers to bring it all together. A charming game with beautifully-animated characters, it showed Nintendo that it hadn't quite got the field all to itself.



JOE MONTANA FOOTBALL II 1992

■ The final game Jim was involved with before moving into hardware design at Sega. Though built on the *Madden* engine, the *Montana* series opted for a more passing-focused, arcade feel and the endless in-game chatter was still quite a novelty at the time.

SELECTED TIMELINE

JIM HUETHER

- **Flag Capture** [Atari 2600] 1978
- **Sky Diver** [Atari 2600] 1978
- **Steeplechase** [Atari 2600] 1980
- **RealSports Football** [Atari 5200] 1982
- **Xevious** [Atari 5200] Unreleased
- **The Sporting News Baseball** [Apple II/C64/PC] 1988
- **4x4 Off Road Racing** [C64/PC] 1988
- **Street Sports Football** [Apple II/C64/PC] 1988
- **California Games 2** [Various] 1990
- **Joe Montana Football** [Mega Drive/Game Gear] 1990
- **Castle Of Illusion** [Mega Drive/Game Gear] 1990
- **James Buster Douglas Knockout Boxing** [Mega Drive/Game Gear] 1990
- **Pat Riley Basketball** [Mega Drive] 1990
- **Joe Montana Football II: Sports Talk Football** [Mega Drive] 1992

ideas when I was stoned and work out the architecture. When I had some really tricky stuff to code, I'd switch to coffee and cigarettes. Then cocaine got popular and I wasn't big into it but I did try coding on it once. I remember thinking, 'Wow, I got a lot done!' I looked at it the next day and none of it worked.

An important life lesson learned, Jim. What did senior management make of it all?
The management when I started was Nolan Bushnell and he loved programmers and loved creativity. He knew how important we were. Then Warner bought it and brought in Ray Kassar and he didn't have a clue. Suddenly there were all these guys doing their suit stuff, nine to five. They'd see us come in late but they never saw us staying till midnight working because they'd gone home by then.

» Jim (seated) demonstrates *RealSports Football* on the 5200 to Steven Spielberg (second from left), as Atari boss Ray Kassar (far right) looks on.



> "Steven Spielberg played my football game with me. That was quite a thrill" Jim Huether

What did you think when Ray Kassar, your boss, dismissed programmers as "no more important than the guy on the assembly line who puts the cartridges together"?
I was disappointed by that remark but I took it as a joke, because I thought he was a joke.

By 1982 you were coding for the Atari 5200. Were you excited by the potential of the new machine?
I'd been working on *Micro Movie* for the Atari computers, which I think was the first colour animation package for a home computer. The idea was that you could make your own cartoons. Unfortunately, Atari said, 'It's not a game, it's not a productivity piece of software and it's not educational, so we can't market this.' I had to stop it, even though it was almost done. So I learned the Atari 400/800 system and saw what it could do. We'd been told the 2600 couldn't compete with the graphics of the Intellivision and suddenly we have a system that could blow it away.

That would explain why your first game for the Atari 5200 was *RealSports Football*, given the popularity of *NFL Football* on the Intellivision. Do you think your game won?
Definitely. I'd got a lot of really good AI in there. When the play started, everyone had a role but that would change according to what happened. The Stanford football coach phoned Ray Kassar and he relayed the message to me that all the team were playing my game and he couldn't get them off it.

Didn't Steven Spielberg play a game against you when he visited Atari?
That was quite a thrill. Turned out he was a football fan so we played one quarter of my game. I was ▶

» [Atari 2600] Jim's first published game was *Flag Capture*, which mixed strategy with time-pressured, head-to-head play.





YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

The warlord answers your prayers

MERMAN: Did you get much feedback from players?

The most influence from a player I ever got was from this guy Steve Stone, who was into *Flag Capture*. He'd ask, 'Could you make it do this?' Mostly, I'd say no but sometimes I could say, 'Sure.' His ideas helped make it a better game.

FGASKING: Did you work on any unreleased games for the Atari 2600?

I tried to do a football game but then Intellivision came out with its football game and management said, 'We can't put something out which just has blocks!' Then they brought out this system called Super Stella, which supposedly had more power. I worked on that, trying to get the football game working, but realised it really wasn't a big enough step forward.

DAVYK: When you built in the option of moving flags that bounce off the walls in *Flag Capture* were you deliberately looking to make the toughest 2600 game ever?

I think there were only a dozen released when it came out, so 'toughest 2600 game ever' wouldn't have made much sense. There's an even more difficult option where the flags go off the edges and return at a corresponding edge, as if the field wrapped horizontally and vertically – that's confusing.

HSW: Can you teach us how to vaporise bananas.

[Laughs], I showed Howard Scott Warshaw this at Atari. You get tubing and tie it to two door handles on a hallway with a leather pouch on the end. Get a banana and walk way back with this thing and let it go and by the time it hits the wall, all that's left is banana mist in the air.



» [Mega Drive] Though born from the *Madden* game, *Joe Montana Football* adopted a more accessible, arcade approach to the gridiron action.

showing him stuff so it wasn't really competitive. If it had been, I would've won.

You also converted the coin-op *Xevious* to the 5200. Did you get much support from Namco?
Atari had done a deal with Namco to put the arcade game out in the US and they were advertising it as, 'The game you'll never be able to play at home.' Myself and Tod Frye went over to Namco in Japan; he was going for *Pac-Man* and I was there for *Xevious*. We learned the structure of the games, not by talking but by looking at the code and pointing. The programmers there used the same assembly language as us so they knew stuff like 'branch' and 'score table' and we got an idea of how the games worked. I got *Xevious* working and it just needed a little more tuning…

Sadly it was never officially released. Why not?
Some 'whizzbang' higher up at Atari decided they needed a third party to compete with us. They used a company called General Computer Corporation on the East Coast and they came up with what became the Atari 7800, which was similar to the 5200. I mean, there are pros and cons with each system. They coded *Xevious* for the 7800 and by the time I'd got my *Xevious* ready, the 5200 wasn't selling, which was a lot to do with the controllers breaking. So they never released my version. They asked me to convert the game to be *Dune*, which wasn't going to be straightforward at all. I put up a fight at first but then I heard rumours Jack Tramiel was buying Atari, so I said, 'Sure, I'll do that,' but I never really did much on it. I knew I'd be leaving soon.



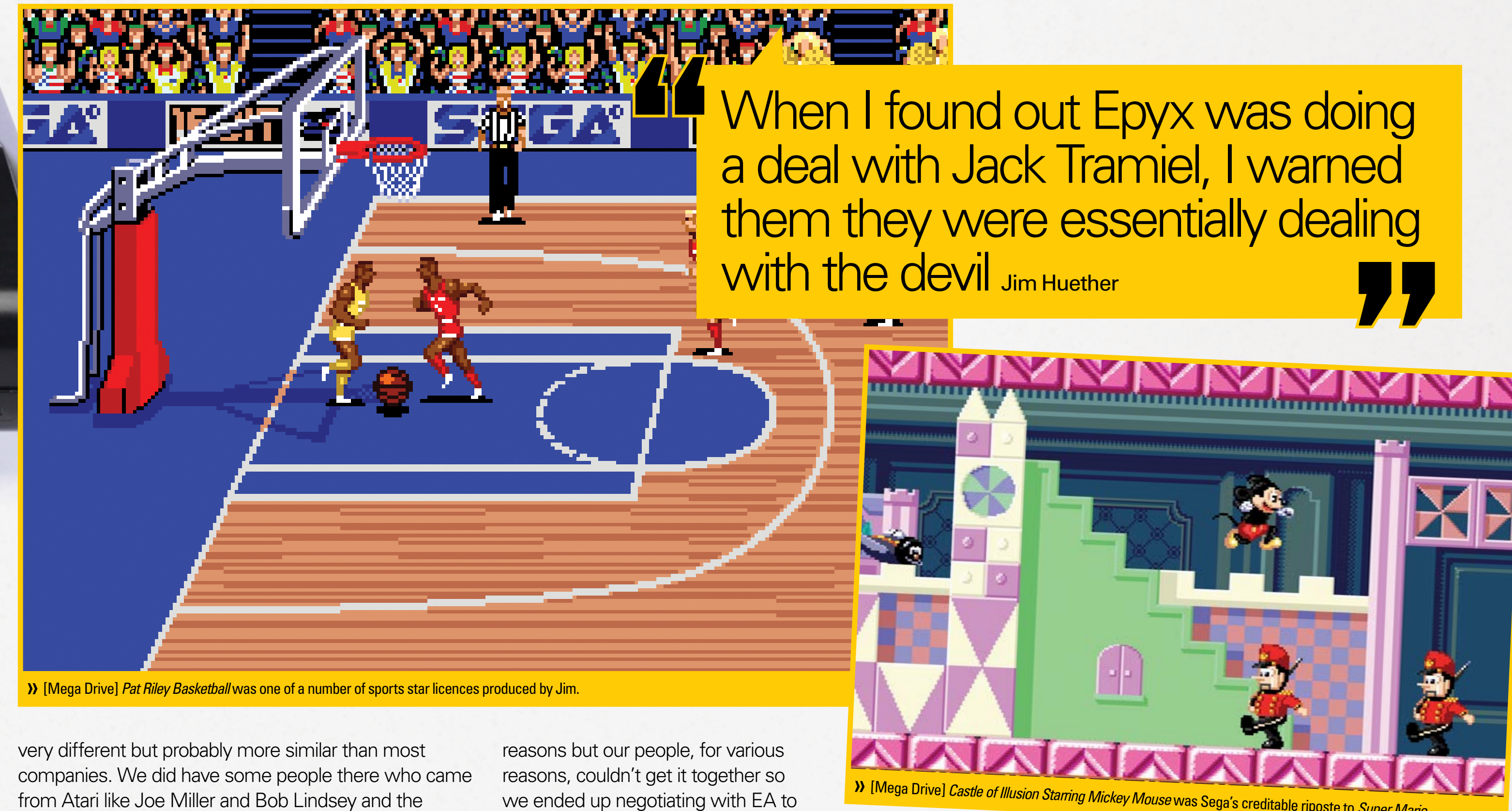
» [Mega Drive] *James Buster Douglas Knockout Boxing* didn't quite pack the desired punch that was intended.

It was a tough time for Atari and the gaming industry in the US in general.
Yeah, in late 1982, sales just flattened out. Revenue was down and we knew our royalties would be way down. Then in 1983 they said they were going to end the royalty plan completely for any new games we wrote. My income went down from $240K to $55K which is a long way to go. Along with that, they put the consumer division under the coin-op management and a lot of people in coin-op really didn't like us because of all the money we'd made. They were jealous of that. They came down hard on us and it just wasn't a fun environment anymore.

You left Atari in 1984 and after toying with edutainment titles for the C64 in the mid-Eighties, you got back into games as a producer at Epyx. Were you happy with this role?
It was kind of what I wanted. Game development had switched from pretty much one person like me doing everything to small teams, with, say, a couple of programmers, an assistant, a graphics person and an audio person, so the producer was still involved in the design direction. We weren't just project managers. Plus, I didn't really want to be a programmer in a team and be told what I had to do.

Did you have much input into the actual gameplay of projects you were producing?
Oh yeah. Some of the games, like *Street Sports Football*, I was managing the conversion from the Apple to the C64 and PC, so that was a matter of tweaking them to make them better for each [target system] but others like *Sporting News Baseball*, I got a lot of input into the actual game.

Was Epyx a different place to work at than Atari?
Nothing was ever going to be like Atari. Epyx was



> "When I found out Epyx was doing a deal with Jack Tramiel, I warned them they were essentially dealing with the devil" Jim Huether

» [Mega Drive] *Pat Riley Basketball* was one of a number of sports star licences produced by Jim.

» [Mega Drive] *Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse* was Sega's creditable riposte to *Super Mario*.

very different but probably more similar than most companies. We did have some people there who came from Atari like Joe Miller and Bob Lindsey and the management was pretty friendly.

So why did you leave?
Because Atari screwed Epyx over and it went bankrupt! I warned Epyx when I found out they were going to do a partnership deal over the Lynx that they were dealing with the devil. They kept saying they had good lawyers and the contracts were ironclad. What basically happened was Atari agreed to pay Epyx money for development and then Epyx would pay them back when they released a product and got income. But Atari kept them from releasing their system so Epyx couldn't pay Atari what was due and therefore they could take over the rights to the Lynx system.

You then went over to Sega as a producer, mainly working on sports games with celebrity endorsements. How important is it to get a big name licence for a game?
If it's a good game, the name can help it sell more, though you have to pay a licence fee, of course. *Pat Riley Basketball* was largely done when I got there and had been programmed in Japan. I tried to get enough of it fixed to make it an okay game. The same with *Buster Douglas Knockout Boxing*. They had made it as just a one-round fight and I pleaded my case with Sega Of Japan for at least five changes or else I wasn't going to continue working on it. I think we managed to make it a C+ game.

You had more involvement with Joe *Montana Football* but that had a difficult time in development too, we believe.
I wanted a horizontal-scrolling game for gameplay reasons but our people, for various reasons, couldn't get it together so we ended up negotiating with EA to change their *Madden football* game.
I had a bunch of requests because I wanted it to be more of a passing game. Hey, it's Joe Montana, he's a quarterback – it needs to be about passing! For all the problems we had, I'm still proud of that game.

You were also producer for *Castle Of Illusion*. Was that a less problematic experience?
No, Sega Of Japan was rigid and stubborn, like we'd send them a prioritised list of things they must fix and things it would be nice to fix… they'd reply to our bug report with, 'No capacity'. I'd get back to them with, 'Make capacity'. I didn't start off in their good graces but I learned how to deal with them. Disney could be very rigid too in their licensing requirements but their producer Stefan Butler and I drove the changes and it turned out pretty good in the end.

Anything you especially changed in the game?
The super-easy mode was my idea. I realised a lot of little kids would want to play it and moms would want to play it with them. That mode was for the moms!

You then became director of peripherals at Sega, which sounds an interesting role.
Coming up with new ideas to improve consumer experience was nice. We did the wireless infrared controllers for the Genesis, which you didn't have to plug them in but god forbid your Great Dane walks in front of the TV. We did the four-player adapter and then I did the Mission Stick for the Saturn, which was an awesome controller. We specifically made it so it could be used by both right and left-handed players too because I'm a leftie and it always pissed me off having to play with controllers made for right-handers.

You worked on the initial plans for the Dreamcast, too. How close were they to the machine which was eventually released?
I never got a Dreamcast so that's hard to answer! I did the first 'White Paper' for it back in late 1995 and early 1996. I had this idea that you could have a master control system in your home so you could play games in different rooms and I wanted the controller port to have audio left and right so you could plug a jack in the controller, put a headset on and get stereo. I was thinking of that for the VR headset…

You were thinking about a virtual reality headset in the mid-Nineties? That's very prescient given the current interest in VR.
I was proposing we could turn it into a sports helmet, so you could play as a quarterback and look around in and hear if someone was running towards you. That would change the game experience. That was the plan and we did some testing but we never got too far.

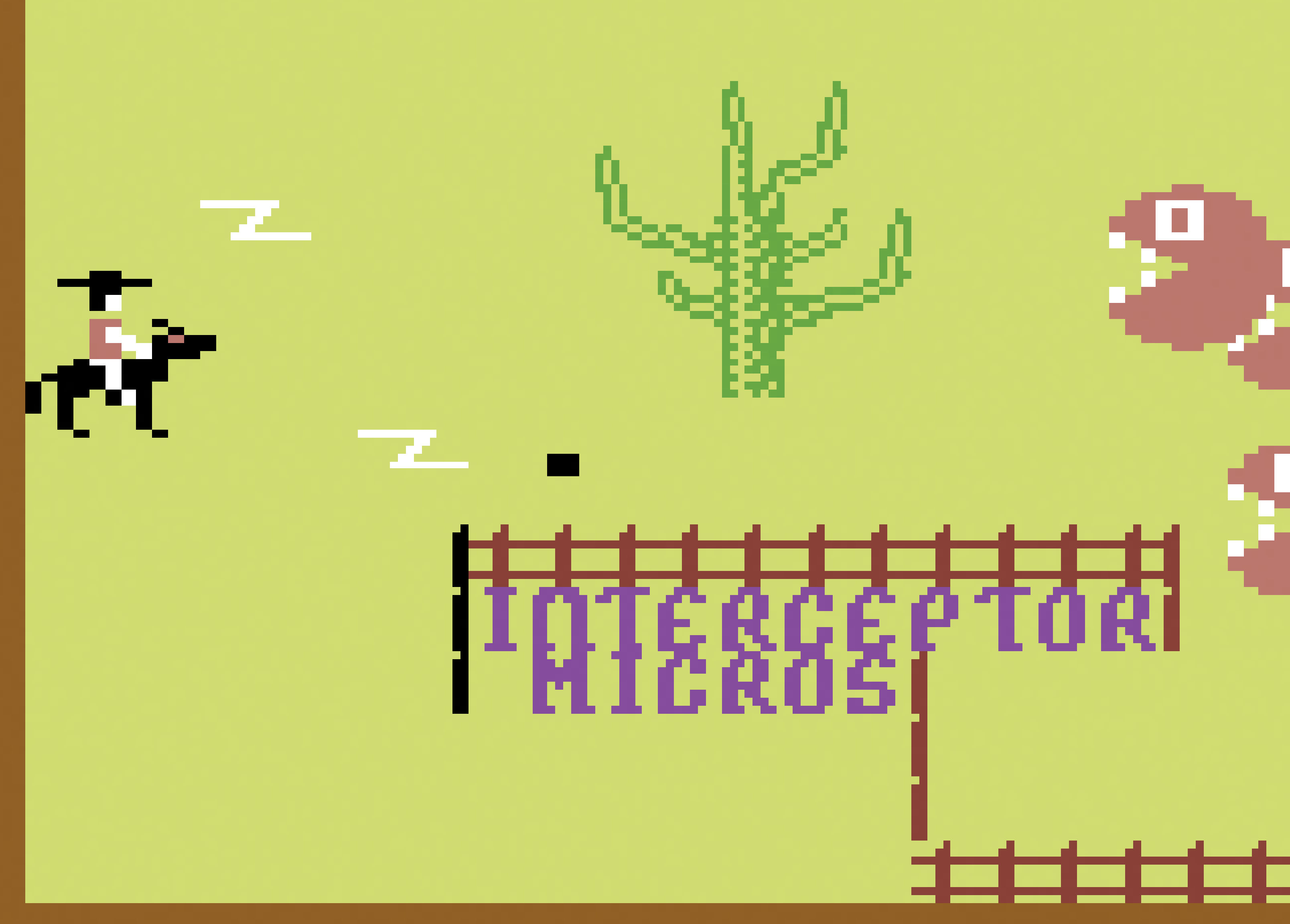
You were really ahead of the game there!
Yeah but nobody cares about that. I was often ahead of my time… but then in other areas I was clueless.

Since leaving Sega in 1996, you have been involved in various projects and are now involved with providing employment services for disabled people. Do you miss making games?
I miss the environment there used to be. Ten years after I left the industry I visited some friends I knew at EA. Everyone was young and into role-playing and I just thought, 'No, that's not me. I've grown up.' ★

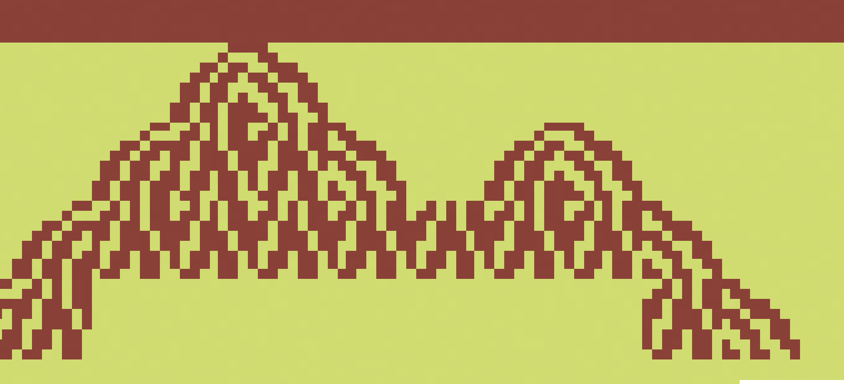
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NO ALSO THANKS

VIDEO C







» RETROREVIVAL

Bandana City

THE MOST BELOVED LOADING SCREEN OF ALL TIME



» COMMODORE 64 » ANTHONY BARTON » 1984

My collection is split over two locations, and one of those is about 150 miles away from where I live. It's a pain – I can only retrieve hardware and software a few times a year, and everything has to be carried back and forth by train. I recently got a rare opportunity to spend time rearranging it all, and I was surprised by some of the things I found. There was a long-lost G-Con 45 in a carrier bag, a loose cassette of *Midnight Resistance* for the C64, and an old C64 head alignment tape with *Bandana City* on the B-side.

Bandana City isn't a particularly great game, if only because the cowboy you control is the least rugged human being ever represented in a videogame – he's so frail that he'll keel over and die if his hat touches a rock, and I wish that was a joke instead of a simple statement of fact. If you somehow survive the first screen with the marauding hamburgers, you'll get a horse and a gun with which to shoot bizarre lightning-emitting enemies that look a bit like *Pac-Man*.

I never particularly enjoyed *Bandana City*. Often I'd play it just because not doing so would seem like a waste, given the time investment involved in loading C64 games from tape. But whenever I saw that loading screen, I was always filled with joy as the head alignment had been successful – and that meant I could soon get on with playing far better games. *



>> This month marks the triumphant return of The King Of Fighters series. We also take a look at Worms WMD and find out if the Cosmic Cavern remake was worth the 36-year wait



» [PS4] As you'd imagine, the two protagonists get split up quite often.

The King Of Fighters XIV

CAN IT RECLAIM ITS THRONE?

INFORMATION

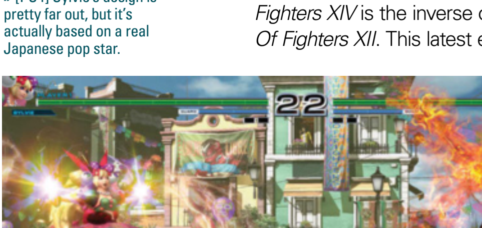
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** DEEP SILVER
- » **DEVELOPER:** SNK
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

This new instalment in *The King Of Fighters* series is the first big shake-up in SNK's long-running fighting series in seven years, and it's fair to say that fans have treated it with some level of caution. That isn't unfair, given that the developer's past forays into 3D gaming have been a mixed bag. Not only that, but that last big shake-up with *The King Of Fighters XII* was a disappointment – a 2D fighter that featured beautiful HD sprites but lacked much in the way of content and tradition, dropping the team gameplay and even failing to include a final boss.

In many ways, *The King Of Fighters XIV* is the inverse of *The King Of Fighters XII*. This latest entry includes everything you'd expect from *KOF* – a huge roster of 50 characters filled with teams old and new, a proper arcade mode with a final boss, and a solid engine. It's also geared towards finding new fans, with a brand-new storyline and some in-game attempts to make things easier for newcomers.

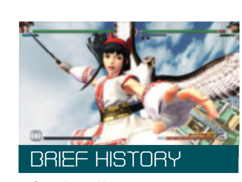
Fans of the series will be right at home with the latest game mechanically, as the meat of the gameplay hasn't changed. Just like in most *KOF* games, fights are three-on-three affairs with no tag-team action, and you'll use a four-button control system. You can still evade projectiles and nip behind your enemy with the evasive move (both light attack buttons), and knock your opponent flying with a 'Blowback' attack (both heavy attack buttons). Max Mode returns, activated with heavy punch and light kick, and allows you to use EX versions of your special moves by pressing both light and heavy buttons. These add speed, power and additional properties to your specials – for example King's Venom Strike projectile becomes Double Strike, adding an extra shot. You can also cancel your super moves in three stages, from basic ones right up to spectacular Climax attacks.

The most controversial new mechanic is the Rush auto-combo, used



» [PS4] Sylvie's design is pretty far out, but it's actually based on a real Japanese pop star.





BRIEF HISTORY

» Starting off as a crossover between *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting*, *The King Of Fighters* has grown into SNK's flagship fighting series. The latest version features a revival of the tournament by the egotistical billionaire Antonov, who claims to be the very first King Of Fighters champion.

WHY NOT TRY

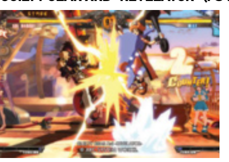
▼ SOMETHING OLD

THE KING OF FIGHTERS '98 (NEO-GEO)



▼ SOMETHING NEW

GUILTY GEAR XRD -REVELATOR- (PS4)



PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Worms WMD

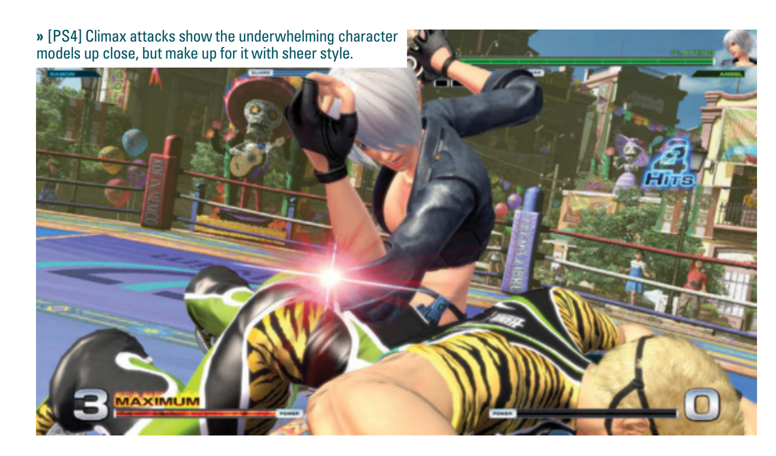
The new vehicles feel a little powerful outside of the single player campaign, but it remains great fun.



NICK

The King Of Fighters XIV

When I started pulling off combos with Terry Bogard, I knew this was a worthy successor to *KOFXIII*.



» [PS4] Climax attacks show the underwhelming character models up close, but make up for it with sheer style.



by pressing light punch repeatedly. You'll perform a string of hits culminating in a special or super move, depending on if you've built your gauge sufficiently for the latter. It's designed to appeal to new players, and while it isn't intrusive we'd have preferred the ability to turn it off.

The roster is an interesting blend of series staples, returning favourites and an eclectic mixture of new characters. Some, like the shifting sand-man Kukri, look like they could have come straight from the later Neo-Geo games, while others like Sylvie have clearly been designed around modern trends (she's a dead ringer for J-pop star Kyary Pamyu Pamyu). Each adds something different to the mix, from Nelson's unconventional boxing gameplay to The King Of Dinosaurs' pro wrestling.

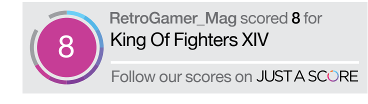
In terms of single-player content, there's a decent tutorial and training mode to get you started, along with missions that teach you advanced combos for each character. Story mode is the main meat of the game, a standard ten-round Arcade mode which packs in some of the series' trademark character interactions and some amusing cutscenes (we're big fans of the egotistical new mid-boss Antonov). The final boss, Verse, is typically unfair, but somewhat less crushing than usual – we narrowly beat him first time on the default difficulty setting. Elsewhere you'll find Time Attack and Survival modes, as well as online and offline multiplayer. That's a basic set of modes, but with so many characters to play with and against it's hard to get bored.

However it's not especially pretty to look at, and that's the biggest flaw in the game. The good news is that the graphics never compromise the function of the game – *The King Of Fighters XIV* runs at a rock-solid 60 frames per second. However, the overall look is of a game that is a generation behind the times, with backgrounds that vary between lively and lifeless and character models that at times resemble mannequins. The only highlight comes in the Climax attacks, which ape the over the top theatrics and hyperactive camera direction of the Ultra attacks from the *Street Fighter IV* series.

SNK has successfully put past 3D missteps behind it, and delivered a fighter with polygonal graphics that actually feels right. Ignoring the visuals, everything is very good from the fighting engine to the massive cast, and if you have people to play with it'll last you ages. There are a few factors holding it back from greatness, though – the slightly substandard visuals, non-optional Rush moves and a lack of the inventive single-player modes, as seen in Arc System Works' games. But that's what sequels are for. *The King Of Fighters XIV* is already a worthy fighting game which holds up well against some very strong PS4 competition, and does its legacy proud. *

In a nutshell

***KOF XIV* sticks to the basics, but does it well. It isn't pretty, but you could spend an age learning all of the characters, and the fighting is rewarding enough to justify it.**





» [PS4] King Of Dinosaurs looks like Tizoc from *Mark Of The Wolves*, but apparently isn't him.

AN OLD CHALLENGER APPEARS

KOF XIV brings in five characters from past SNK titles

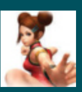
TUNG FU RUE

The shape-shifting fighter has returned for another scrap, despite his advanced age. He's one of the more recognisable SNK characters to make his debut in *KOF XIV*, as he's a mainstay of the *Fatal Fury* series who has made many cameo appearances in the series.



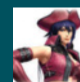
NAKORURU

One of the most iconic faces of the *Samurai Shodown* series has finally made the leap to a major *King Of Fighters* game. According to the storyline, she was disturbed by dark forces within a space-time crack and travelled to the present in order to prevent disaster.



MUIMUI

SNK's recent history is fair game for inclusion too, as Muimui shows – she originates from the *Dragon Gal* series of pachislot machines, which gained popularity in Japan. She's a descendent of the Dragon Clan who loves food and practices ancient kung fu.



LOVE HEART

This is another character with pachislot origins, as she comes from the *Sky Love* series. Unlike the vast majority of characters in *The King Of Fighters XIV*, this sky pirate comes to battle armed with a sword. Just be thankful she left her bazookas back in the pachislot world.

ALICE

If you couldn't tell by her hat and general behaviour, Alice is a massive Terry Bogard fangirl whose fighting style incorporates his moves alongside those of other *Fatal Fury* protagonists. She first appeared in the *Fatal Fury* pachislot game *Garou Densetsu: Legend Of The Wild Wolf.*

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

Worms WMD

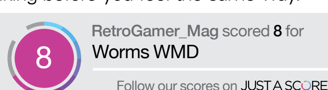
» **System:** PS4 (tested), PC, Xbox One » **Publisher:** Team17
» **Cost:** £19.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

There are two very different schools of thought on what a good *Worms* game should be. Some will forever champion the purity and competitive complexity of the earlier games, shunning over-the-top gimmick weapons in favour of the thrill of perfectly reading and dealing with wind to land a pinpoint Bazooka shell from across the map. Others, conversely, just want a daft party game with as many crazy weapons as possible for maximum mayhem and hilarity. For the latter camp, *WMD* is easily one of the best in the series yet, though purists will need to do a far bit of option adjustment to pare back the chaos. Still, the fact that it manages to cater to both crowds is commendable indeed.

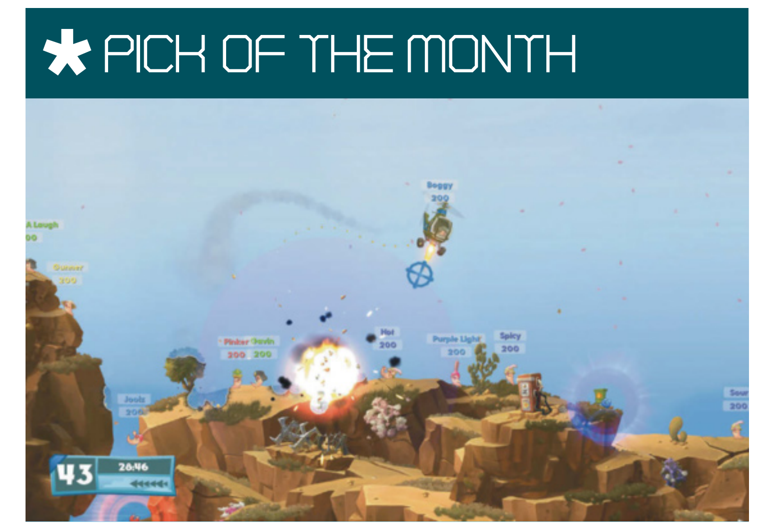
Vehicles are the main new addition, with tanks, choppers, cars, mounted guns and mechs offering varying degrees of mobility and extra firepower. Using them can feel a little cheap, but it does make you a hot target – expect to see rival teams form temporary allegiances to shut down your hardware. Buildings are also new, coming in various sizes and hiding whatever lies inside from view until one of your units enters… by which time it could already be too late. Defending these structures with Mines and Sentry Guns is common, so firing a few shots on a potentially hostile building to get a peek inside is usually a good idea.

One of the more interesting additions, however, is crafting – a way to build and improve weapons between turns, even while opponents are making their moves. It's a fresh new level and some of the enhanced gear available can be devastating, so it's a system you won't want to ignore.

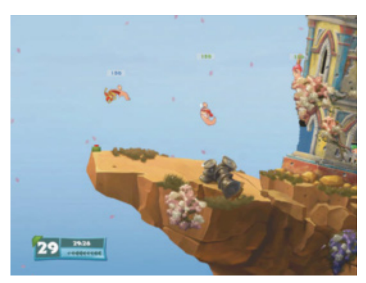
With a host of options and a full suite of customisation tools that let you retool your experience just about however you want, *WMD* is an excellent addition to the franchise. Just don't be surprised if you have to mess around in menus for a little while to tweak the game to your liking before you feel the same way.



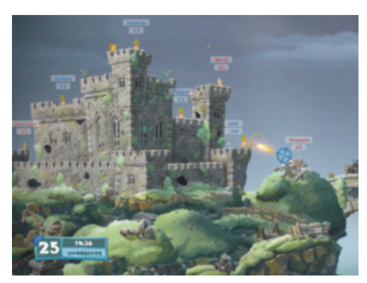
★ PICK OF THE MONTH



» [PS4] Strafing runs in a chopper can be devastating, although odd handling makes landing the real challenge.



» [PS4] During local multiplayer, it's important that you shout 'SHORYUKEN!' when performing a Fire Punch.

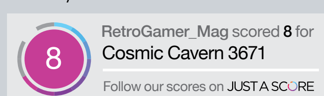


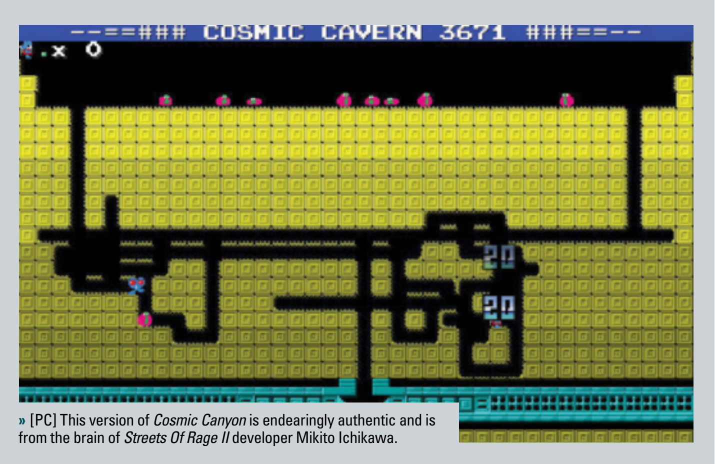
» [PS4] Building interiors are a novel new feature, as structures can hide all manner of dangers.

Cosmic Cavern 3671

» **System:** PC » **Buy it for:** £3.99 » **Buy it from:** Steam, Playism

This action strategy game is originally the brainchild of Takaya Arita, and involves you protecting a base at the bottom of the screen from marauding monsters by digging pits. When an enemy falls, it'll be stunned and you can run into it to destroy it. The original Sharp MZ-80 version is quite plain today, but two additional arranged modes have been added – an MZ-700 version and a full arcade-style remake, complete with an addictive jingle, a new monster type and an addictive combo mechanic based on destroying stacked enemies. It sometimes feels like high scores are a little too dependent on finding the randomly located power-ups (one randomly refills soil, another doubles your score), but otherwise it's a cheap treat for fans of early Eighties arcade games – it's easy to learn and hard to master.





» [PC] This version of *Cosmic Canyon* is endearingly authentic and is from the brain of *Streets Of Rage II* developer Mikito Ichikawa.

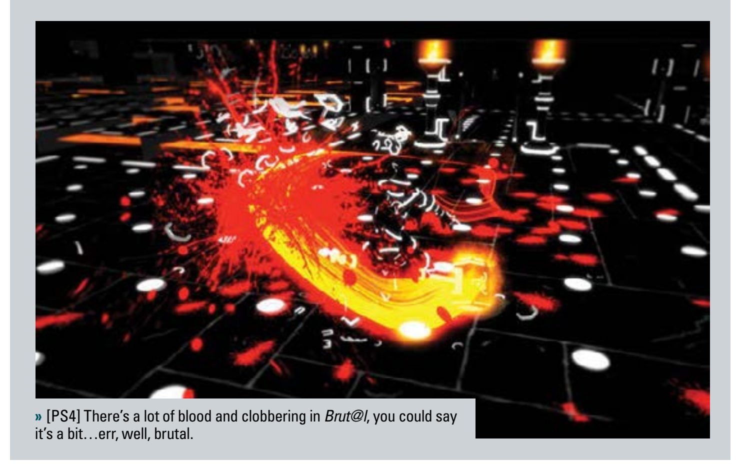
Brut@l

» **System:** PS4 » **Buy it for:** £11.99 » **Buy it from:** PlayStation Store

What's that? *Gauntlet* got trapped in a ZX81 and then got zapped with an Evolve-o-ray and bumbled onto the PS4? Well, *Brut@l* isn't exactly that, but it's pretty damn close…

The twist of this indie rogue-like dungeon-crawler is that you can craft weapons and enchantments using ASCII letters found squirrelled away inside chests, pots or the occasional enemy. Generally, it's slow to get started, and odds are you won't have a weapon made until you've at least cleared two floors, forcing you to mundanely break every object you see in the hope of finding a letter. Mechanically, it plays a lot like a *Lego* game, so if you like smashing things for loot, over and over again you'll get a kick out of it. An inventive take on the genre that should appeal to anyone that ever owned a ZX81.





» [PS4] There's a lot of blood and clobbering in *Brut@l*, you could say it's a bit…err, well, brutal.

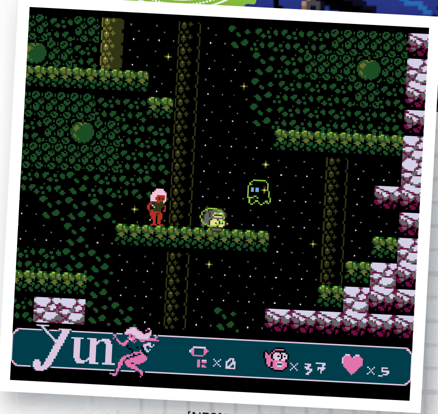
Gamers HOMEBREW

Brewing since 2005

» [Mega Drive] It's in a cave and has a story… what could it be?

» [MSX2] The quest for money starts all over again!

Gaming NEWS



» [NES] Yun is looking pretty special, but make sure you're wearing your clever hat.

CAVES, OWLS AND SUSHI

We haven't mentioned the Mojon Twins' game *Uwol Quest For Money* in quite a while but there was a time when the news of conversions came thick and fast… and the little money-grabber is back for another outing, this time on the MSX2. The graphics and sound take advantage of the new platform, but the rest remains intact: Uwol wants to emulate his videogame heroes by exploring the pyramid-shaped cellars of the Storm Palace to find 250 gold coins. Go searching for riches behind Kikstart.eu/uwol-msx2 for conversion developer Imanok's website.

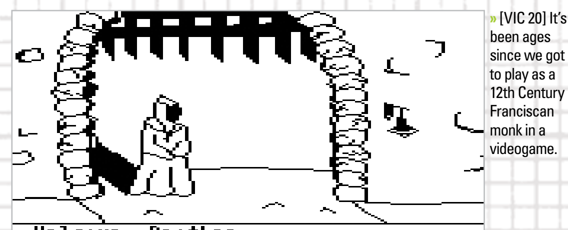
Another conversion, but this time from a different direction, is the currently in-progress Mega Drive port of 2004 indie release *Cave Story*; the player's character wakes up in said cave boasting a bout of amnesia, with the game's story unfolding as they explore the depths. Kikstart.eu/cave-story-md goes to the developer's Github page for the Mega Drive code where the latest version should be available to download. We had a quick roam around and this conversion looks to be remarkably close to Pixel's original, with the visuals, gameplay and cutscenes being as authentic as possible.

The third conversion that caught our attention is *Agony!* – and, no ,that doesn't mean it's painful to play. This is a remake of a shooter for the Amiga which was published by Psygnosis and hands the player control of the owl in its logo, rather than a spaceship. For the uninitiated, the original is a horizontally-scrolling affair with lots of enemies, power-ups and impressive visuals throughout; this new Windows-based version already appears to be building upon that admirably and there's a preview at Kikstart.eu/agony-prv-win – it requires a 64-bit machine at the moment, something we hope will be rectified by the final release so that a wider audience can experience it.

And finally, we return to the Mojon Twins and their newest NES game *Yun*, a platformer where the titular character in question must explore each stage and capture some cute-looking fish by blowing bubbles to trap them. There are other nasties getting in Yun's way and reaching some of the more inaccessible parts of the game's map will take skill and lateral thinking. Kikstart.eu/yun-nes goes to the relevant part of the developer's website, including a more than slightly bizarre storyline about sushi and serving people to fish!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**



» [VIC 20] It's been ages since we got to play as a 12th Century Franciscan monk in a videogame.

LIFE'S TOUGH ENOUGH

Athanor is a text adventure with graphics for the VIC-20 which already exists on a couple of other 8-bit systems including the C64 and comes in two languages – English and French – despite the game itself being set in southern Italy! The player takes on the role of a 12th Century Franciscan monk investigating strange goings on at one of his order's abbeys.

A VIC with 32K of RAM and disk drive are required to play, and more information can be discovered at Kikstart.eu/athanor-vic along with the download.

> "There are items to collect, alongside block pushing puzzles"



» [ZX Spectrum] We're quite liking the look of *Car Wars*.

POST-APOCALYSE PUZZLES?

The title makes it sound like a *Roadblasters*-style driving and shooting game, but *Car Wars* on the 128K Spectrum is instead a top-down, flip-screen action-based title where a car must be guided around, avoiding other vehicles and their bullets. There are also items and coins to collect, alongside some block pushing puzzles similar to *Sokoban*.

We've given *Car Wars* a quick test drive and found it slightly tricky, but enjoyable nontheless. Kikstart.eu/car-wars-spec has a review video showing off the nice in-game graphics and provides those all-important download links.

·HOMEBREW HEROES·

Programmer Jean-Philippe Meola has released Knight 'N More, a Ghosts 'N Goblins-inspired game that expands on one of his previous titles. We grabbed him for a quick chat…



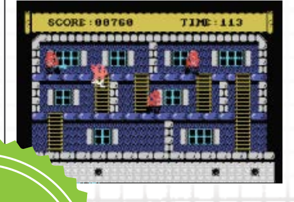
Your latest game is a reworking of your previous release *Ghost 'N Zombie*, how did it come about?
Ghost 'N Zombie got a limited cartridge with instruction booklet and box edition. Some collectors bought it because it was 'limited' and did some speculation, therefore a lot of ColecoVision fans were frustrated at not being able to get a CIB version at a reasonable price. So I decided to create a new version that was different, but not too much, to satisfy both worlds, with the new version not being a limited edition. In addition, *Ghost 'N Zombie* development started as a 'Hello World' to test the development kit on hardware I hadn't mastered and the result was not as polished as I would have liked.

And how much development work has gone into *Knight 'N More*?
Transforming *Ghost 'N Zombie* to *Knight 'N More* took me about 200 hours. I totally reworked the graphics and sound, changed compression routines, rewrote and optimised a lot of code, added new content, adjusted the gameplay and fixed lot of bugs. The hard part was that *Ghost 'N Zombie* already used the 32K of ROM available no more bytes were free at the start of the project. The biggest challenge was to clean and optimise the code to have enough room to do the improvements… I could have used a bank-switched cartridge to have more ROM space, but I voluntary stuck with the 32K limit. It's more challenging and more authentic, and the game in this form could have been done in 1982.

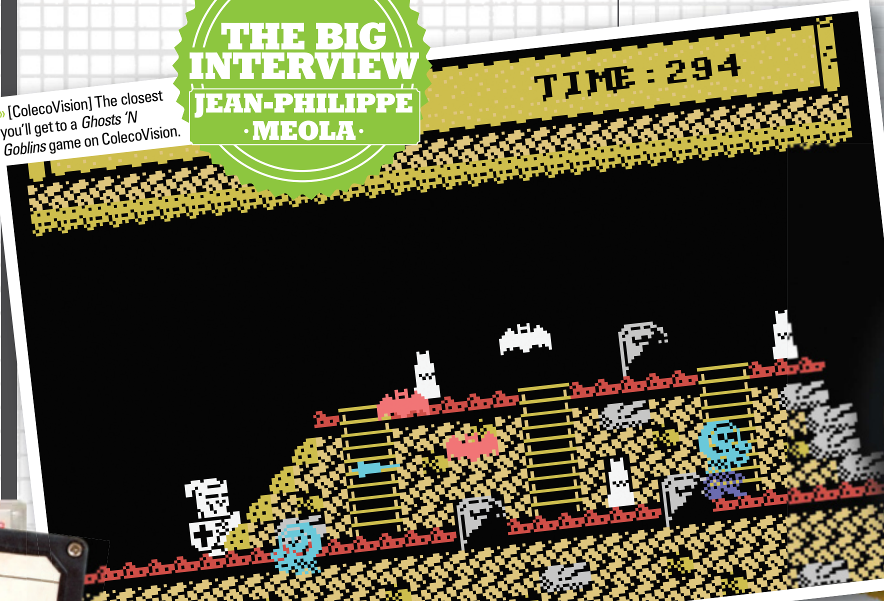
Did you find it difficult returning to a previous project in this way?
It wasn't so difficult, it took me a lot of more time than expected, though. The code of *Ghost 'N Zombie* was ugly, but as it was done in C language, it wasn't hard to find my way.

What kind of feedback have you had so far from players?
Extremely good – they want 'more *Knight 'N More*'. Even if the game is difficult, they enjoy it and like the challenge.

Finally, can you tell us what you're working on next?
I have lots of projects ongoing. Currently the more advanced one is a *Commando*-inspired game for the ColecoVision. But I have also a long term project, I work time to time on, is an *OutRun* kind of game, still for ColecoVision, that will use the Driving Module. Then I would like to move to another platform which will be the Amstrad GX4000. I think the GX4000 has interesting hardware and there are almost no games using it.



THE BIG INTERVIEW
JEAN-PHILIPPE ·MEOLA·



» [ColecoVision] The closest you'll get to a *Ghosts 'N Goblins* game on ColecoVision.

Gaming REVIEWS

DO YOU REMEMBER?

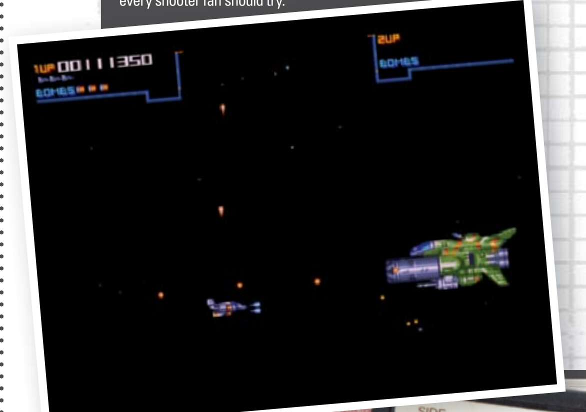
The main inspiration for Vision Software's Amiga blaster *Cybernetix* is obviously the coin-op classic *Defender* – the levels scroll horizontally and a scanner shows what's happening elsewhere in the play area – but there are also *Asteroids* drifting around which can be shot, sometimes releasing distinctive blue crystals.

One of the enemy craft types will scurry to collect said gems and there's a range of other nasties that have their own bespoke behaviour to deal with, including the hard-to-destroy Assassins which relentlessly chase the player, Spinners that occasionally pause their drifting to spew out bullets or the Layers which leave pods behind that must be avoided or shot.

You can dive in with guns blazing or take a cautious approach, but *Cybernetix* is fun either way. Find it at Kikstart.eu/cybernetix-amiga.

» [Amiga] Taking out a few mine layers and the mess they've made.

» [Amiga] A solid Defender clone that every shooter fan should try.



» [Mega Drive] We'll teach you a lesson, a state of confusion to keep you all guessing!

BITBITJAM 3

» **FORMAT:** VARIOUS » **DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BITBITJAM-3 » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Game Boy] Hopefully the cake isn't a lie this time...

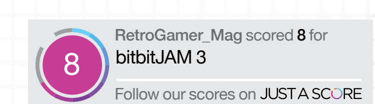
» [Amiga] The teddy bear chainsaw massacre – blood and stuffing everywhere.

The third instalment of the bitbitJAM, a game jam for 8-bit and 16-bit computers and consoles, finished recently over at Game Jolt. The theme this time was "Princess carnage" and, despite only giving entrants a week to build their games, it still disgorged 20 entries in total and a few titles in particular grabbed our attention; *Bare Knuckled Princess*, for example, is a one-on-one brawl in the style of *Punch Out!!* where two blue-blooded fighters take part in a literal royal rumble, trying to slap each other into submission.

Pretty Princess Castle Escape and *Where's My Cake* for the Game Boy and Game Boy Color respectively are both platform-based action games. The objectives are different with one being a scrolling adventure and the other a creature-destroying battle against the clock, both are challenging but fun.

There were a few RPGs as well with *Princess Red Keyboard Warrior* being our favourite; this was partly due to the chosen platform – it's built to run on an IBM XT286 PC with CGA graphics – but also because the combat between Red and her assailants revolves around typing words quickly in a *Typing Of The Dead* manner. The 286 wasn't the most obscure platform either, *Revenge Of The Killer Princesses* runs on a Netronics Elf II, a microcomputer trainer kit released in the late Seventies!

One or two games pushed the envelope as regards the competition's theme like *Kung Fu Guns* on the Amstrad CPC, which is a flip-screen brawler based in the Wild West that, according to the author, will see an upgraded release soon. A couple of other incomplete titles like the scrolling racer *Downforce* for the Mega Drive or NES shoot-'em-up *Drakaina* also need further work from their authors but look promising and will become more fully-fledged releases soon. It's worth trying most of the entries out, there are some gems and a couple that are a little weak, but the overall standard was good.

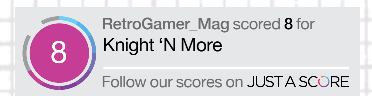


KNIGHT 'N MORE

» **FORMAT:** COLECOVISION » **PRICE:** TBA
» **DEVELOPER:** JEAN-PHILIPPE MEOLA
» **DOWNLOAD:** ATOMICFE.COM/COLECOVISION/

This is the tale of a brave knight setting out to defeat the forces of evil, strolling into a battle reminiscent of arcade classic *Ghosts 'N Goblins* but without the scrolling backgrounds. He's armed with his trusty sword and a suit of armour to protect his body as he hacks and slashes his way through a series of locations that are populated by hostile fauna and dangerous flora.

This isn't a walk in the park, either, and the difficulty curve is steep; the knight starts with a reasonable stock of lives and takes a couple of hits to actually kill, but dying sets him back at the start of the current stage. Gamers with a low frustration threshold or slow reflexes may struggle to enjoy it, but there's still quite a bit of entertainment in learning the enemy movement patterns and finding safe places to fire at them from.



» [Colecovision] Perhaps taking the boss on topless wasn't a good idea...?



» [Colecovision] It might not scroll, but this remains a solid take on the classic Capcom game.



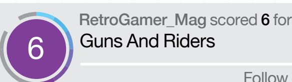
GUNS AND RIDERS

» **FORMAT:** NINDENDO GAME BOY » **DEVELOPER:** JM CLIMENT
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/RIDERS-GB » **PRICE:** FREE

There's a new sheriff in town and he's looking to deal with all the varmints in that time-honoured way: by shooting them, of course! That doesn't mean they won't fire back and there's a vast number of them to be dealt with as well, in fact they just keep coming no matter how many of their Stetson-wearing comrades fall!

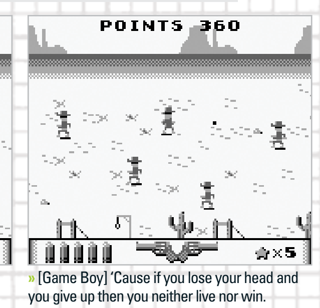
Okay, so there's absolutely no depth whatsoever to *Guns And Riders* since it's a simple shooter with fixed speed horizontal scrolling that also feels somewhat incomplete since the player only gets one life and there's no variety in the enemy movement or graphics – the music also speeds up during play to comical levels!

But plodding relentlessly through the desert and filling what appears to be a literally endless parade of cowboys with an equally inexhaustible supply of lead is cathartic, so this is at least good to wind down with after a rough day.





» [Game Boy] There's something strangely satisfying about shooting cowboys.



» [Game Boy] 'Cause if you lose your head and you give up then you neither live nor win.



ROUNDUP

There's an overall theme of chunkiness to this round-up. We'll start with *Fort Django* on the C64, a flip-screen run-and-gun game where said fort is overrun by bad guys and only one poncho-wearing cowboy can mow them down. Journey to Kikstart.eu/django-c64 for more.

The Apple II's low resolution mode gets very little love, so *Space 4048* is most welcome; it's a gallery style shoot-'em-up that's currently a work-in-progress but looking pretty solid. Take a look at the video behind Kikstart.eu/4048-video to see it moving.

And finally we have *Cellar Celery* for the Atari 2600, although only some of the graphics are chunky here; the sticks of sentient celery that the player must let pass are quite detailed, as are the vegetarians which must be incinerated. Find more at Kikstart.eu/celery-2600.

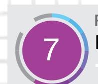
PAC-PAC

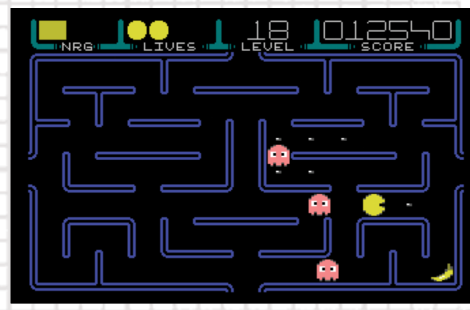
» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4 » **DEVELOPER:** GÁBOR 'SKORO' VARGA » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PACPAC-264 » **PRICE:** FREE

Naturally, this is a loose interpretation of *Pac-Man* in the same way that most of the Eighties 'clones' were; the formula of a dot-eating ball being spectres is there, but the specifics are different.

The maze changes with each stage, there aren't power pills but a random bonus item occasionally appears which sometimes has that effect – it can also impede the ghosts in other ways such as slowing them down or turn the tables on the player by reversing their controls or spawning another enemy – and Pac has an energy gauge which needs to be topped up with fruit.

There are more accurate implementations of *Pac-Man* on the 8-bit systems with some even employing the original's game logic, but *Pac-Pac* isn't trying to be accurate and shouldn't be judged that way; it is entertaining and challenging in its own right, so worth some attention.


RetroGamer_Mag scored 7 for
Pac-Pac
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [Plus/4] The mazes are well designed, but watch out for choke points.



» [Plus/4] Not having standard power pills greatly changes the gameplay of *Pac-Pac*.



MAILBAG

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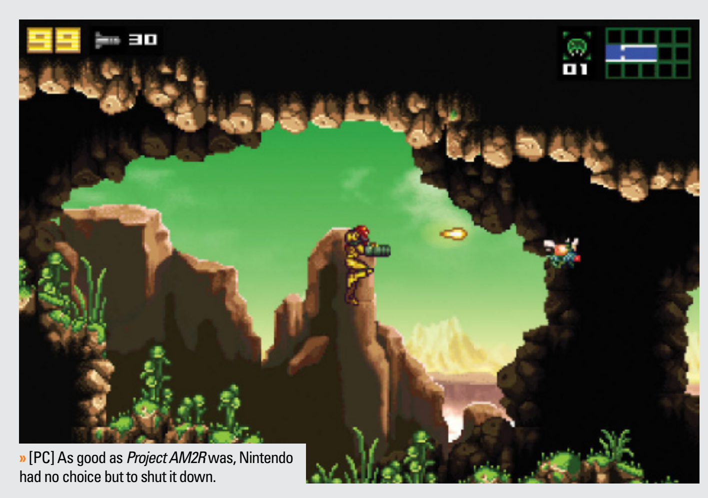
STAR LETTER

A STEP TOO FAR

Dear **RG**,
What is Nintendo playing at? I ask this because *Project AM2R*, a brilliant remake of *Metroid II: The Return Of Samus*, has just been killed off by lawyers. Fans pay tribute to their favourite game by making something that Nintendo hasn't offered, and Nintendo responds with brute force and threats.

I've seen this happen way too much over the years. Sega did it with *Streets Of Rage Remake*, Square Enix did it to *Chrono Resurrection*, and Konami shut down the *Metal Gear* remake. A group of fans decides to satisfy the wishes of other fans, and the publishers get scared and kill the projects.

Why does this happen so often, and what hope is there that the publishers will adopt a lighter stance on fan games in the future?
James McKenna


» [PC] As good as *Project AM2R* was, Nintendo had no choice but to shut it down.

The problem is that Nintendo has to protect its intellectual property rights, regardless of who is infringing upon them – even if they're fans making not-for-profit games. In some countries, it's possible to lose your trademark rights if you allow third parties to use them without challenge. Additionally, you've got to consider the effect this might have on sales of downloadable games. Who will buy the original *Metroid II* if there's an enhanced remake available for free?

While we're not sure that we'll ever see a time when legal action against fan game creators ceases, we'd like to see publishers bringing them into the fold. Look at *Sonic Mania* – some of the developers behind that started off making fan games, and their dedication has made it something that people are genuinely excited about.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Dinosaurs
Darran is convinced that dinosaurs make everything great. The rest of us aren't quite so sure – Luke likes to remind him that *Jurassic World* exists, and Nick has challenged him to watch the entire *The Land Before Time* series (yes, all 14 films). The challenge has yet to be answered.



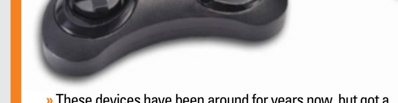
CHEAP PLUG

Having got excited at the prospect of Nintendo rereleasing the NES as a small, but durable, portable with 30 games in built for a November retail release, I find it cheeky that AtGames which releases questionable Sega ports through a licensed third party are trying to cash in on the party by releasing another console supposedly to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Sonic The Hedgehog* in October.

The clever packaging and artwork will con customers into thinking they have got the real deal only to realise these knock-offs are not remotely close to the original in terms of gameplay and sound quality.

Also it won't be able to play any of the old Sega games for its in-built slot due to compatibility issues, so not much of a bargain for £50.
Cisko Kidd

It was a bit surprising to see the wave of interest from the mainstream press when the new Mega Drive plug-and-play was announced, given the fact that such machines have been around for years. There are definitely some valid criticisms of the machines – as you say the sound could certainly be improved. Having said that, we've not experienced game compatibility issues with the machine.


» These devices have been around for years now, but got a surge of interest thanks to Nintendo's announcement.

However, it's important to note that we don't know how good Nintendo's offering is yet. While the machine certainly *sounds* exciting, we can't say just how the Nintendo Classic Mini: NES compares to the Mega Drive classic consoles until we actually get our hands on it.

HERE'S MUD IN YOUR EYE

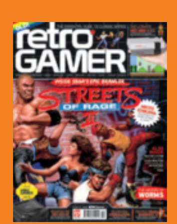
Do you cover MUDs (multi-user-dungeons)? One of the most retro-style gaming formats for computers, it's a text-based format (think *Zork* but an MMO). I was wondering because there seems to be a huge revival going on, whether it's *Initium*, or *Imperian* they seem to be getting better, more in-depth and more user friendly. *Initium* even has a user interface when using a browser. I just figure this might be up your alley.
Scott Alexander

It doesn't seem that we've done a feature on MUDs yet, but they're definitely a valid topic for a future feature. Funnily enough, Nick actually went to the University of Essex, where the first MUD was developed, and where cocreator Richard Bartle is still lecturing on game design today.



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EXPENSE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I love the magazine. Unfortunately I'm not a regular customer as I'm only in the bookshop every few weeks and I can't subscribe on my phone. What I have seen, though, is excellent.

I've written in to talk about budding retro gamers, especially those of us too young to get a credit card. What with the rise of emulators and tiny, 80-game consoles, retro gaming is not only for nostalgic adults, but for people of all ages, heads turned by the wave of Eighties and Nineties games. And so you get the console with a few games, and you enjoy it, as I have. But then you get into retro games, start researching and you realise it's 100 Euros to get *Castlevania*!

Case in point: I got a Mega Drive with 80 games. I got very interested in Sega and looked at their other consoles. I liked the look of them all. But the one that caught my attention the most was the Dreamcast. I thought I would really enjoy *Shenmue*, arguably its flagship game. When looking at prices of the game though, I found out it was 220 Euros to buy just the games! And then you can add another 50 Euros to that for the console, which I thought would be 40 Euros after looking at Amazon! And don't even talk about the Sega Saturn!

My point is, I think the retro games industry needs to get a little cheaper if it wants to be less niche.

Luke Fox-Whelan

P.S: Contrary to that, could you tell me some good retro shops in Dublin?

It's true that if you're after the more highly sought-after titles, you're going to run into some price problems sooner or later – and *Shenmue* is definitely one of those games. The problem is that supply is fixed, but demand keeps going up as the gaming population increases. That said, all consoles have their cheap classics.

When it comes to getting expensive games, you have three options: grin and bear the price, adopt an opportunistic approach and only pounce if you see a bargain, or avoid the original. For example, if *Symphony Of The Night* is too expensive on PlayStation, remember that it's available for download on PSN, Xbox Live and can be found as part of *The Dracula X Chronicles* for PSP.

As for retro gaming shops in Dublin, the only one we know of is The Rage on Fade Street.



» [SNES] If you like the idea of *Earthbound* but baulk at SNES cartridge prices, why not download it on Wii U?



» [Dreamcast] With games that haven't been reissued, you'll have to either accept the price or wait for a bargain.

From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Codemasters game?

ArchaicKoala
Micro Machines '96 all the way! I still play it today for some lovely J-Cart multiplayer madness – the track designer is a nice bonus, too!

joefish
Treasure Island Dizzy on the Atari ST was a delight. Bright and colourful, with a decent object-led arcade adventure to crack.

ncf1
Let's see… it's either *BMX Simulator* or *Dirt 3*. I think I'll opt for *Dirt 3*, which is amazing and *BMX Simulator* is just crap.

Bluce_Ree
I was underwhelmed by most of their overrated *'Advanced'* simulator games but *ATV Simulator* was a great twist on the *Kickstart* formula. Even if it was weird having your ATV taken out by a seal balancing a beach ball.

flatapex
Obvious choice for me – *TOCA*. It was the first time someone paid attention to my sport (BTCC), licensed the cars, reproduced the circuits and allowed players to drive as real drivers.

the_hawk
ROCK. STAR. ATE. MY. HAMSTER. It's a very basic game at heart, but there's something about it that draws me back to it again and again. After all these years, I still find it funny, too.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Rockstar Ate My Hamster* was a controversial success story for Codemasters.

Mayhem
Covered recently in **RG**, but I always got a lot of play time out of *Slicks* on the C64 back in the day, especially in two-player mode.

deadpan666
I'll say *Rise Of The Argonauts*, if only to point out that Codemasters can still make good games that aren't about driving! It's a great, under-appreciated RPG that held my attention long enough to finish it….something even *Knights Of The Old Republic* couldn't do!

kaiserspike
It has to be the *Music* series, hours and hours piled into creating dodgy Nineties techno/jungle tracks. Still have them on a memory card somewhere…

Whazeboo
Ninja Massacre on the C64. At the time I played this enjoyable little game a lot without knowing it was actually a clone of a certain game known as *Gauntlet*.

retro GAMER

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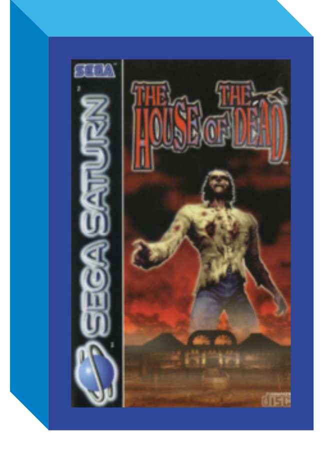
Everything you need to know about Nintendo's diminutive answer to the PlayStation 2

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

ALSO INSIDE

Super Mario 64, Chase H.Q., Amstrad CPC Plus, The House Of The Dead, Tex Murphy, Glenn Corpes, Licence To Thrill: Toy Story, Marauder, Ninja Baseball Bat Man, Chase The Express, Beyond Games, The Hit Squad, Super Scramble Simulator

ENDGAME



THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD

» What is it with mad scientists? They never seem content with trying to make a toasted milk sandwich, it's always cheating death or something. Such was the case with Doctor Roy Curien, a whacked-out quack whose experiments ended up letting zombies loose all over his mansion. Enter Thomas Rogan and G, who are tasked with sorting out his mess and rescuing the surviving human scientists. Let's jump to the end…



01

» The Magician has been defeated, and the AMS agents rightly point out that their ordeal is finished. Nobody comments on how blocky the texture work has become since they moved from Arcadeville to the low-rent district of Saturn City.



02

» Rogan extends a parting message to the mad scientist that inevitably died at the hands of his own creation. It's a surprising courtesy, given that Curien's attempts to play god resulted in this incident and caused an untold number of deaths.



03

» More predictably Rogan also bids farewell to his fiancée Sophie, a researcher at the mansion who was smashed into a wall earlier by a mutant warrior. She collapsed after telling you to stop Curien, presumably having died…



04

» As the AMS agents are leaving, they turn to look at the mansion one last time – and by some sort of miracle, Sophie's standing there! Despite her previous injury, she's managed to escape to the main hall. She's a healthy shade of greenish grey, too. Wait, are humans that colour?



05

» Oh no! Rogan's beloved is the last zombie, and he knows what must be done. Turning away as G raises his pistol, he still hears the gunshot that ends the short undeath of his beloved. Of course, you could have spared him the pain by finishing the game in one credit with 60,000 points.